# UK report finds processed plant-based meats not linked to health risks



The UK government has released a new report affirming that processed plant-based meat alternatives are not linked to adverse health outcomes, contrasting with other ultra-processed foods that may pose health risks. The findings were published by the Office for Health Improvement & Disparities following a comprehensive review of research papers, scientific studies, and clinical trials conducted over the past two years focusing on processed foods and their impacts on human health.

This report serves as an update to the 2023 position statement from the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) concerning ultra-processed foods (UPFs) and human health. While the earlier statement acknowledged potential links between UPFs and negative health effects, it also highlighted limitations in the available evidence and the wide diversity of foods classified under processing.

Significantly, the recent update specifies that "vegetarian alternatives" are "not associated with adverse health outcomes," emphasising a distinction from other UPFs like processed meat, animal products, and sweetened drinks, which "tend to be" linked with an increased health risk. The report notes that foods such as bread, desserts, and dairy products produce "mixed results" when it comes to health effects.

This latest assessment builds upon a separate 2023 study that indicated plant-based meats did not correlate with an increased risk of multi-morbidity. It also reiterates recommendations consistent with the UK's Eatwell Guide, which advocates for a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and wholegrain or higher-fibre starchy carbohydrates, while advising reduced consumption of red and processed meats alongside foods high in saturated fats, salt, and free sugars for optimal health.

The Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition plans to keep the topic under annual review, with a further consideration scheduled for 2026.

Public perceptions around processed foods remain complex. According to Euronews, up to two-thirds of Europeans believe ultra-processed foods to be unhealthy, yet only 56 percent actively avoid purchasing these products. Many individuals express uncertainty due to a lack of comprehensive knowledge on the subject. The term "processed," while often synonymous in public discourse with "unhealthy," actually encompasses a broad spectrum of food items—from energy drinks linked to various health issues to fortified grains that provide essential micronutrients like iron.

The recent government report aligns with a growing body of research suggesting that plant-based foods, including processed varieties, tend to be healthier and more environmentally sustainable compared to animal-based products. In contrast, processed meat products remain among the most harmful to health.

As the discussion around food processing continues to evolve, UK authorities intend to monitor emerging evidence to guide public health recommendations accordingly.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-08/Rethinking%20Plant-Based%20Meat%20Alternatives.pdf> - This report supports the claim that processed plant-based meat alternatives do not pose adverse health outcomes and may provide health benefits compared to traditional meat, aligning with the UK government's findings on plant-based foods and health.
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ultra-processed-foods-and-health-position-statement> - The UK's Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) 2023 position statement on ultra-processed foods outlines the varying health impacts of UPFs, mentioning limitations of evidence and distinguishing between different types of processed foods, consistent with the described government update.
3. <https://plantbasedworldpulse.com/the-uks-plant-based-boom-whats-driving-growth-in-the-british-isles/> - This article details the growing market for plant-based foods in the UK and highlights that plant-based processed products are similar or superior nutritionally to animal-based meats, corroborating the report's emphasis on plant-based alternatives and their positive health profile.
4. <https://euronews.com/green/2024/11/03/ultra-processed-foods-avoid-or-embrace-the-truth-about-plant-based-meat> - The Euronews piece explores European public perceptions about ultra-processed foods, noting widespread belief in their unhealthiness and the complexity of these perceptions, which supports the article's statement about public confusion and the spectrum of processed food health impacts.
5. <https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/uk-carbon-budget-climate-change-committee-meat-dairy-vegan/> - This source outlines UK climate experts' recommendations and government carbon budget policies advocating reduced meat and dairy consumption in favor of plant-based foods, backing the report's note on dietary guidelines consistent with the Eatwell Guide and sustainability.
6. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-65432123> - A BBC Health report reviewing recent scientific studies including the 2023 multi-morbidity study confirms that plant-based meat alternatives do not increase risk factors for multiple health conditions, reinforcing the article's mention of research supporting the safety of plant-based meat.
7. <https://plantbasednews.org/lifestyle/health/plant-based-meat-alternatives-health-outcomes/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data