# Thousands of UK deaths potentially linked to ultra-processed food consumption, new study finds



New analysis has suggested that thousands of deaths in the UK may be associated with the consumption of ultra-processed foods (UPFs). This study highlights potential links between UPF intake and an increased risk of premature mortality, with UPFs including products such as ice cream, processed meats, crisps, mass-produced bread, certain breakfast cereals, biscuits, and fizzy drinks. These food items have been previously connected to various health issues, including obesity, heart disease, cancer, and early death.

Research indicates that UPFs can be characterised by high levels of saturated fats, salt, sugar, and additives, frequently replacing more nutritious options in people's diets. They are also known to contain preservatives, emulsifiers, and artificial colours and flavours that are generally absent from home-cooked meals.

While the precise reasons behind the correlation between UPFs and health issues remain unclear, experts have expressed differing views. Some posit that the negative health impacts could be attributed to the processing methods themselves, whereas others suggest that the link might be due to consumers opting for foods that are inherently high in unhealthy ingredients.

The study, published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine, involved data from eight countries and revealed that UPFs account for 53 per cent of the energy intake among individuals in the UK, making it the second highest level in the study, trailing only the United States at 55 per cent. The mathematical modelling within the research suggested that around 17,781 premature deaths in the UK could be attributed to UPFs in 2018/19.

Eduardo Nilson, the lead investigator from the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation in Brazil, stated, “UPFs affect health beyond the individual impact of high content of critical nutrients (sodium, trans fats, and sugar) because of the changes in the foods during industrial processing and the use of artificial ingredients. Assessing deaths from all causes associated with UPF consumption allows an overall estimate of the effect of industrial food processing on health.” His analysis indicated that each 10 per cent increase in UPFs within a diet correlates with a 3 per cent increase in the risk of death from all causes.

However, Stephen Burgess, a statistician at the University of Cambridge, pointed out that the observational nature of the study does not establish a definitive causal relationship. He noted, “This type of research cannot prove that consumption of ultra-processed foods is harmful, but it does provide evidence linking consumption with poorer health outcomes.” Burgess raised the possibility that underlying risk factors, like physical fitness, could be instrumental rather than UPF consumption itself.

Nerys Astbury, an associate professor from the University of Oxford, highlighted the known detrimental effects of diets high in calories, fat, and sugar. She acknowledged the study's contribution to the body of evidence associating UPFs with negative health implications but also pointed out its limitations. Astbury insisted on the need for more robust research to establish a causal link between UPFs and diseases, while cautioning against hastily implementing dietary recommendations based on this study alone. She noted that the Nova classification system, which categorises foods based on processing levels, has limitations that could compromise its efficacy in this context.

This new analysis adds to the ongoing discourse surrounding dietary patterns and health implications, particularly in the context of a growing reliance on processed foods in modern diets.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.ft.com/content/cf42fe94-d3be-46f5-b45e-1eed8b45dba9> - This article discusses the harmful effects of ultra-processed foods (UPFs) in the UK, highlighting their contribution to health issues such as obesity, heart disease, and cancer, and the need for public awareness and clear labeling to reduce consumption.
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/330e3f93-519a-4821-b521-232faad02307> - The piece advocates for stricter regulations on UPFs, including banning misleading advertisements and mascots, to address the significant health risks associated with their consumption in the UK.
3. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0749379723003513> - This study analyzes data from three large cohorts in the UK and US, finding that higher UPF consumption is linked to increased all-cause and cardiovascular disease mortality, with multiple metabolic pathways playing mediating roles.
4. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0749379723003513> - The research indicates that each 10% increase in UPF consumption correlates with a 3% increase in the risk of death from all causes, supporting the study's findings on the health impacts of UPFs.
5. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0749379723003513> - The study highlights that higher UPF consumption is associated with increased risks of all-cause and cardiovascular disease mortality, emphasizing the need for dietary interventions to reduce UPF intake.
6. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0749379723003513> - The research suggests that multiple metabolic pathways, including liver function, inflammation, lipid metabolism, and glucose metabolism, mediate the association between UPF consumption and mortality.
7. <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/ultra-processed-foods-to-avoid-obesity-b2742800.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data