

The EU's food and drink industry is playing down the findings of a [new study](#) in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine that links eating more ultra-processed foods, or UPFs, with a higher risk of premature death, arguing that the conclusions can't be considered definitive.

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According to Brussels-based trade association FoodDrinkEurope, the very concept of ultra-processed foods remains "hotly disputed" and as such can't be used for "public health guidance."

The most widely used definition of ultra-processed foods is the Nova classification, drawn up by the University of Sao Paulo in Brazil in 2009, which covers a wide range of foods, from sugary drinks to ready-made meals that use many types of additives to imitate "real food."

Recently, the French health agency criticised Nova's definition for focusing solely on the presence of additives and substances without further distinction, arguing that this approach cannot reliably indicate a health risk.

FoodDrinkEurope points out that other factors – such as physical activity, lifestyle, or pre-existing health conditions – are also important contributors to mortality.

“For these reasons, expert public health authorities in the UK, Nordic countries, and France have rejected using UPFs as a basis for public health guidance, warning that it risks oversimplifying nutrition science and confusing consumers,” the trade association wrote in a statement.

It also noted that the European food industry is "stepping up" by reformulating products to offer more nutritious choices to support "healthier living."

Consumers' pushback

The findings were welcomed by SAFE, a European consumers organisation focusing on food, which said it had been warning about the effects of ultra-processed foods for years.

Luigi Tozzi, deputy director of SAFE, said it was not just the level of processing that mattered, but also the overlap between UPFs and higher levels of "fat, salt, and sugar" due to the additives they contain.

"This is a very dangerous combination and poses a serious health risk. The EU and member states must address this risk through regulatory and fiscal policy," said Tozzi.

"The Commission will launch a study on the impact of the consumption of the so-called 'ultra-processed foods'," reads the European Commission's [Vision](#) for Agriculture and Food.