

- Convenience foods

## Plant-based ultra-processed food linked to heart disease

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If you thought any plant-based foods were good for your health, you could be mistaken – especially if it's processed. It seems ultra-processed plant foods may not be the health food you'd hope for when it comes to your heart health.



Research led by the University of Sao Paulo and Imperial College London, using data from more than 118,000 people on the health impacts of plant-based ultra-processed foods (UPFs) found they pose a higher risk for cardiovascular diseases compared to less-processed plant-based foods.

Eating plant-based UPFs is linked to a 7% increase in the risk of heart disease, compared with eating unprocessed plant-based foods.

They also found the consumption of animal-based and plant-based UPFs was linked to a higher risk of cardiovascular diseases and dying from them.

So while plant-based UPFs may be marketed as healthy alternatives, they're linked to worse health outcomes and we should reduce our consumption of them.

Dr Eszter Vamos, co-author of the study, from Imperial College London, said: "Fresh plant-based foods such as fruits and vegetables, wholegrains and legumes are known to have important health and environmental benefits.

"While ultra-processed foods are often marketed as healthy foods, this large study shows that plant-based ultra-processed foods do not seem to have protective health effects and are linked to poor health outcomes."

UPFs are generally higher in salt, fat, sugar, and contain artificial additives. Previous research has linked UPFs with a range of poor health outcomes, including obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer.

Eating more plant-based non-UPFs was linked to better health outcomes, and replacing plant-based UPFs with plant-based non-UPFs was linked with a 7% lower risk of developing cardiovascular diseases and a 15% lower risk of dying.

But consumption of plant-based UPFs was associated with an increased risk of both these outcomes.

Dr Fernanda Rauber, a researcher at USP and first author of the study, says that despite being plant-based, these UPFs can contribute to risk factors such as high blood pressure due to their contents and processing. She advocates a shift towards plant-based foods with minimum processing to improve our heart health. Analysis showed that upping dietary plant-based non-UPFs by 10% was also linked to a 13% reduction in mortality from all cardiovascular diseases, with a 20% reduction in mortality caused by coronary heart disease.

The researchers say that, based on the available evidence, nutritional guidelines promoting plant-based diets should focus not only on reducing the amount of meat and other animal-products people eat, but also on the level of processing involved in the food, and avoiding UPFs.

Often marketed as health foods but don't seem to be protective