

# UNILEVER'S POSITION ON THE HEALTH IMPACT OF ULTRA-PROCESSED FOOD



## Background

Current dietary recommendations are based on decades of nutrition science, during which time the link between the consumption of specific nutrients and foods, and the risk of developing non-communicable diseases has been investigated. Dietary recommendations provide guidance to the consumer about what foods and nutrients are to be included in a healthy diet, and what foods and nutrients should be consumed in moderation.

Though most food classifications are based on food groups (e.g. fruits and vegetables; cereals; dairy; fats and oils), recently classifications based on the level of processing have been developed. An example is the NOVA classification, which introduced the term ultra-processed food. Siga, is another classification of foods based on processing level and inspired by NOVA. Both systems are based on the degree of processing of food and link this to the impact of a food on health, rather than the nutritional composition of food. These classifications advocate against the consumption of all ultra-processed foods, regardless of their contribution to nutrient intake. Specifically, the use of additives is demonized. As a result, the public perception of (ultra) processed foods and of additives is becoming more negative.

## Context

Almost all food and drinks require some form of processing before consumption. Food is processed for many reasons – to make it safe, edible and keep it at consistent nutritional quality. Food processing also provides wider availability and convenience, and through preservation it reduces food loss and waste.

The use of additives is important to maintain and/or improve the safety and freshness (preservatives), taste (sweeteners), texture (emulsifiers, stabilizers, thickeners) and appearance (colours) of foods. The use of additives is strictly regulated by governmental bodies to safeguard the use in foods and beverages.





## **Unilever's position**

We believe that the nutrient quality of a product determines its health impact. That is why Unilever continuously improves the nutrient quality of its food and beverage portfolio. We do this by reducing nutrients of concern, such as salt, sugar and fat, and by increasing positive nutrients such as protein, fibre, vitamins and minerals, and ingredients such as fruit and vegetables.

In our view, all foods - whether home-made, artisanal or packaged foods - can deliver products that are high in nutrient density and low in calories. We believe that the classification of the health impact of foods should be based on robust scientific evidence, as opposed to the level or extent of food processing.

Additives are present in food to deliver a functional benefit (such as preservation) and Unilever complies with all relevant regulatory requirements associated with food additives.

Industrial processes applied by Unilever are safe for consumers and their families.

## **Unilever's commitment**

The world's food system is unsustainable and needs to change. Unilever is taking action to make that happen. The food system should be serving consumers, and producers, fairly. It should be cutting waste and promoting sustainable agriculture. And it should be giving everyone access to quality nutrition, with plenty of plant-based choices.

As one of the largest consumer goods companies in the world, Unilever provides products that are safe, fulfil our high standards for quality and meet all regulatory requirements. If there are no local regulations, we follow the CODEX guidelines.

Unilever complies with all relevant regulatory requirements for food additives, which are set by expert scientific panels based on the robust review of available toxicological data and consumer exposure, enabling the derivation of safe levels for consumption.

Being mindful of consumer concerns on the use of certain additives we clearly indicate their presence in ingredients list, so consumers can make an informed choice, and where feasible we design products without them.





Because we believe that the nutrient quality of a product, the frequency of consumption, and the amount consumed determines its health impact, we continuously improve the nutrient quality of our food and beverage portfolio by reducing nutrients of concern, such as salt, sugar and fat and by increasing positive nutrients. In addition, we provide nutrition information per serving, give portion guidance and support portion-control initiatives.

Unilever recently set a new bold 'Future Foods' ambition to help people transition towards healthier diets and to help reduce the environmental impact of the global food chain. As part of this ambition, Unilever also committed to clear time-bound targets to continue lowering calorie, salt and sugar levels across products and to double the number of products delivering positive nutrition globally by 2025. Progress is reported annually.

For more information on Unilever's Future Foods ambition visit [Positive nutrition | Unilever](#)

In addition, we also have our strict marketing and advertising principles. For more information on Unilever's marketing and advertising principles visit [Advertising and marketing | Unilever](#).

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