

Ultra processed foods and cancer

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We read with great interest the paper by Cordova et al.¹ on the incidence of multimorbidity for cancer and cardiometabolic diseases in the EPIC cohort in relation to the consumption of ultra-processed foods (UPF).

We believe that the data presented do not fully support the conclusions of the article.

The extreme heterogeneity found in the association between the consumption of the different subgroups of UPF and the clinical events observed during follow-up is clear and shows, in our opinion, that interpreting the effects of food on the basis of its degree of processing, at least in terms of its association with the risk of multimorbidity, is not useful and can be misleading.

The authors conclude that “our results suggest that higher consumption of UPF increases the risk of cancer and cardiometabolic multimorbidity”, but their data only show that consumption of foods of animal origin and sugary or artificially sweetened beverages is associated with such a risk, which is not surprising.

This indicates that the association between UPF consumption and the risk of multimorbidity would

disappear if the data were adjusted not only for the consumption of sugary or artificially sweetened beverages, but also for foods of animal origin at the same time. Indeed, in our opinion, the article underlines the absolute need to return to the evaluation of foods on the basis of their nutritional role (including their nutrient composition, quantities consumed, metabolic effects, etc.) and not on the basis of their degree of processing.

Contributors

FV, DDR, VF, FM, AP conceived, wrote, and edited the manuscript.

Declaration of interests

AP and FM are the Chairman and Scientific Director, respectively, of NFI – Nutrition Foundation of Italy, a non-profit organization partially supported by Italian and non-Italian Food Companies. DDR is Chair of the Board of the ONFOODS Foundation. FV and VF declare no conflict of interest associated with this work.

References

- 1 Cordova R, Viallon V, Fontvieille E, et al. Consumption of ultra-processed foods and risk of multimorbidity of cancer and cardiometabolic diseases: a multinational cohort study. *Lancet Reg Health Eur.* 2023;100771. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lanepe.2023.100771>.



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