

Let's be Cholesterol SMART[®] with Ultra-Processed Foods (UPFs)

Cholesterol SMART[®]

Can support heart health in different ways



- ♥ Low in Saturated Fats ♥ Heart Healthy Fats
- ♥ Fortified with Plant Sterols or Stanols
- ♥ Source of Fibre ♥ Vitamins & Minerals

Potentially Cholesterol SMART[®]

These may or may not be heart healthy



CHECK THE LABEL



NOT Cholesterol SMART[®]

Best to avoid



♥ HIGH IN SATURATED FAT ♥ HIGH IN SALT

HIGH IN SUGARS ♥ LACKING HEART HEALTHY NUTRIENTS



Use front-of-pack traffic light labels to guide your choices.

● GREEN = Go! ● AMBER = Occasionally ● RED = Avoid
Check for SATURATES, SUGARS & SALT. (Don't worry about Total Fats)
Find out more about food labels www.heartuk.org.uk/cholesterol-smart/food-labels



Find out more about UPFs

www.heartuk.org.uk/cholesterol-smart-upf



What Are UPFs?

- Ultra-processed foods (UPFs) are typically classified under the NOVA system.
- The NOVA system classifies a food as a UPF based on how industrially processed it is, if it has five or more ingredients, and if those ingredients include things you wouldn't typically use in home cooking, such as additives and flavourings.

But Here's the Problem

- The UPF label doesn't reflect a food's nutritional value or whether it supports heart health.
- It ignores whether a food contains proven cholesterol-lowering nutrients such as fibre, heart healthy fats, or added plant stanols and sterols.
- While many UPFs are high in saturated fat, salt, and sugars – and should be limited – others are backed by strong evidence for supporting heart health.

Key Takeaway

Focus on Nutrients, Not Just Processing. Don't judge a food's healthiness solely by how processed it is. What truly matters for your health, including your heart, is the quality of the nutrients it provides.

Make Informed, Cholesterol SMART® Choices. While limiting some highly processed foods is wise, remember that some UPFs can offer real heart health benefits due to valuable nutrients like fibre, healthy fats, or added plant sterols and stanol esters.

Cholesterol SMART® with Everyday Foods – Even Some UPFs!

Here is what a heart-healthy diet looks like. It's based on foods with the right balance of healthy foods. Some are **ultra-processed**  others are not.

Choose unsaturated fats instead of saturated fats

Use moderate amounts of **vegetable-based spreads**  and oils such as olive, sunflower and rapeseed, **instead of** butter, lard or coconut or palm fats.

Go wholegrain

Choose **wholemeal bread** , brown or wild rice, oats, bulgur wheat, quinoa, or **fortified wholegrain cereals**  like Weetabix and bran flakes.

Include more plant proteins

Add beans, lentils, **tofu** , **soya products**  or **plain Quorn®**  pieces, mince or fillets to meals. Try part-swapping or replacing red and processed meats.

Eat at least 5-a-day

Keep it colourful and varied – fresh, frozen, or canned all count.

Cook more from scratch

Add proven cholesterol busters

- Oats or barley
- Beans, peas or lentils
- Unsalted/unsweetened nuts (a small handful)
- **Products with added plant stanols or sterols**  (spreads, yogurts, and shot drinks)*

Make SMARTER snack and drink swaps

Switch cakes, biscuits, crisps and sweetened drinks for:

- Fruit
- **Low-fat or fat-free yogurt with no added sugar**  or **sugar-free jelly** 
- A handful of dried fruit or nuts
- Switch to sugar-free or no added sugar versions of your favourite soft drinks
- Carrot sticks with **low-fat hummus** 

Packaged foods  Always check front-of-pack **traffic light labels** - look for **low (green)** in saturates, salt and sugars.

Let's Minimise!

- ✗ Red and processed meats
- ✗ Butter and animal fats
- ✗ Coconut and palm fats and oils

- ✗ Coconut milk and yogurt alternatives and coconut-based products
- ✗ Cakes, biscuits, crisps, pastries, fast food, sugary drinks
- ✗ Snacks with red traffic lights for saturated fats, salt or sugars



Check how heart healthy your diet is! www.heartuk.org.uk/cholesterol-smart/diet-quiz



Visit Cholesterol SMART® hub www.heartuk.org.uk/cholesterol-smart

HEART UK - actively supported by gifts in wills & donations www.heartuk.org.uk

* Foods fortified with plant sterols and stanol esters, when consumed as part of a healthy diet and lifestyle, have been shown to lower blood cholesterol. High cholesterol is a risk factor in the development of coronary heart disease. The beneficial effect is obtained with a daily intake of 1.5-3g plant sterols/stanols.



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