Expert Perspectives on **Processing, Nutrition and Health**

What experts are saying **and why it matters**



Public discussion can make **"ultra-processed food"** sound like a settled, uniform scientific concept. But experts in nutrition, food science and food engineering are raising important questions about how the category is defined, what it captures and whether it provides enough information for dietary guidance or policy.

Across different disciplines and regions, four themes emerge:

1

Definitions need scientific precision

"The term 'ultra-processed' is difficult or most probably impossible to define, and it has little technological relevance."

Yrjö H. Roos, PhD
University College Cork | Ireland

Sam Saguy, PhD
Technion–Israel Institute of Technology | Israel

The term **"ultra-processed"** does not describe one specific, measurable process. That makes it difficult to apply consistently across research, products and markets.

2

One category can hide important differences

"A major methodological limitation of the NOVA classification is the heterogeneity within the 'ultra-processed food' category, which groups together products with vastly different nutritional profiles and potential health impacts"

Mina Babashahi, PhD
Shiraz University | Iran

S. Faezeh Hashemi Moghaddam
Shiraz University | Iran

Foods placed in the same category may differ substantially in nutrients, ingredients and role in the diet.

3

Nutritional quality and dietary role matter

“The nutrient content of a food and its place in a food group are more important than the extent to which a food was processed.”

Julie Hess, PhD
U.S. Department of Agriculture | United States

Processing is one characteristic of a food. Understanding healthfulness requires looking at what the food provides and how it fits into the overall diet.

4

Guidance should examine the food, not just the processing characteristic

“Well-founded dietary recommendations require a differentiated analysis of nutrient composition and specific ingredients.”

Hannelore Daniel, PhD
Technical University of Munich and Technische Universität Dresden | Germany

Thomas Henle, PhD
Technical University of Munich and Technische Universität Dresden | Germany

Sound guidance should distinguish among foods and focus on the characteristics most relevant to health, **rather than assuming that one broad category provides the answer.**

What this means for the conversation

Experts often emphasize that nutrition science is complex and that guidance should focus on nutritional quality, dietary patterns and real-world context. But this nuance does not always make it into public conversation. Broad labels can become shorthand for whether a food is “good” or “bad”, associations are reported as proof, and processing is treated as a stand-alone measure of healthfulness.

Bringing a wider range of expert perspectives into the conversation ensures public health decisions are informed by evidence and lead to guidance that is credible, practical and useful.

