



Steve Barclay, Secretary of State for Health and Social care

16th May 2023

Dear Secretary of State,

I am writing to you on behalf of the nearly 14,000 people who signed our petition calling on you to remove the UK government's Good Choice badge from ultra-processed products; introduce dietary guidelines to address ultra-processed foods; introduce a percentage reduction target to reduce ultra-processed food consumption to more healthy levels by 2030 and talk to families about their experience of ultra-processed foods, working to ensure that healthy foods are more accessible and affordable.

Nearly 2,000 people also emailed their MP asking them to support our campaign. As a result, MPs have asked your department questions in parliament about what action the government is taking to tackle the impacts of ultra-processed foods, including introducing dietary guidance and a percentage reduction target for these foods and asking you to ensure the Good Choice badge in the NHS Food Scanner App is not applied to ultra-processed products.

In response, we welcomed the news that SACN is carrying out a review of the evidence and aims to publish an assessment this summer. We are concerned, however, by Minister Neil O'Brien's suggestion that, in defence of the App's promotion of ultra-processed food, "making the step to the healthiest option may be too far for many people in one move". This, surely, should be a primary aim of the UK Government's health policy. The very least the government should do is remove their endorsement from these foods.

As the evidence of the health impacts of ultra-processed diets continues to build, action on ultra-processed food is gaining support from academics, clinicians, governments and commentators alike. Evidence compiled for a Food Standards Agency and Food Standards Agency Scotland report published in May 2022 revealed widespread concern among the public about the long-term health and safety implications of "over-processed" foods and support for regulatory action.

Research recently released by the British Nutrition Foundation revealed a growing number of British adults were familiar with the term 'ultra-processed' and were trying to reduce these foods in their diets. We know how difficult that will be. Ultra-processed foods are cheap, accessible and heavily marketed – often more than healthy foods. People often have very little choice or autonomy over whether to buy and eat them, especially in locations where minimally-processed and fresh food is scarce. Furthermore, as it's often not possible for consumers to identify whether a product is ultra-processed from the ingredients list, it follows that it's also not possible for them to manage consumption of them as part of a balanced diet. Consumers don't know what they are eating, while the serious health impacts of diets dominated by these foods are rising.

The UK government must take action to address the over-consumption of ultra-processed foods, remove their Good Choice badge from these products and support people to eat less of them.

Yours sincerely,

Cathy Cliff
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