

Study assesses how participants respond to the labels 'vegan,' 'healthy,' 'sustainable'

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As presented at the [Society for Risk Analysis 2023 Annual conference](#), Patrycja Sleboda from Baruch College—CUNY and her colleagues from the University of Southern California have conducted a national food

choice experiment to determine how people respond to labels such as "vegan" and "plant-based" compared to "healthy," "sustainable," or "healthy and sustainable."

Research has shown that limiting [meat](#) and [dairy intake](#) and eating more fruit and vegetables reduces the risk of cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes, and cancer. Diets with less meat and dairy are also more environmentally sustainable because they have a smaller carbon footprint.

In this study, all participants (n=7,341) chose between a food gift basket without meat and dairy and another with meat and dairy. Participants were randomly assigned to one of five conditions, in which the gourmet food gift basket without meat and dairy was labeled as "vegan," "plant-based," "healthy," "sustainable," or "healthy and sustainable."

The food gift basket without meat and dairy was less likely to be chosen when its label focused on its content (stating "vegan" or "plant-based") rather than its benefits (stating "healthy," "sustainable" or both).

- Only 20% of participants chose the food basket without meat and dairy when it was labeled "vegan," while 27% chose it when it was labeled "plant-based."
- In contrast, 42% of participants chose the food basket without meat and dairy when it was labeled "healthy," 43% chose it when it was labeled "sustainable," and 44% chose it when it was labeled "healthy and sustainable."

This labeling effect was especially pronounced among individuals who identified as red-meat eaters and held across socio-demographic groups.

Thus, changing [labels](#) is a low-cost scalable intervention for promoting healthy and environmentally sustainable food choices.

Provided by Society for Risk Analysis

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