

POSITIONS OF MEDICAL AND SCIENTIFIC ORGANIZATIONS ON THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF EATING MORE PLANTS AND LESS RED MEAT

Diets featuring less meat and more fruits and vegetables are beneficial to maintaining a healthy weight and reducing the risk of diet-related chronic diseases. Many Americans have heeded this advice, and red meat consumption in this country has dropped about 25 percent since the mid-1970s.¹ But the standard American diet still falls short of health experts' recommendations when it comes to meat consumption. On average, Americans eat 3.1 ounces of red meat per day—much more than the 1.8 ounces that the USDA recommends.

Many of the nation's leading medical and public health organizations link high red meat consumption with obesity and chronic diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes, and some cancers. As is evident from the following statements, these groups agree that diets featuring less red meat and more fruits and vegetables help improve health.

AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION

“Going meatless at a meal every now and then can help you lower your cholesterol and may reduce your risk for cardiovascular diseases. And unlike a strict vegetarian diet, mixing in some meatless meals won't require you to give up your carnivorous ways. **You can still eat lean meat—just less of it.**”² [emphasis in the original]

AMERICAN INSTITUTE FOR CANCER RESEARCH

“A review of all relevant research has shown that diets high in red meat are linked with increased risk of colorectal cancer . . . Instead of planning dinner around red meat, choose your vegetables and whole grains first, then think of red meat as a garnish or condiment to flavor your meal.”³

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

The CDC endorses “A healthy eating plan” that “emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat free or low-fat milk and milk products.”⁴

2015 DIETARY GUIDELINES ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO THE U.S. DEPARTMENTS OF AGRICULTURE AND HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

“The overall body of evidence . . . identifies that a healthy dietary pattern is higher in vegetables, fruits, whole grains, low- or non-fat dairy, seafood, legumes, and nuts . . . [and] lower in red and processed meat . . . For conclusions with moderate to strong evidence, higher intake of red and processed meats was identified as detrimental compared to lower intake.”⁵



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NATIONAL CANCER INSTITUTE

“Red meat and processed meat are associated with an increased risk of colorectal cancer, and evidence also suggests their association with some other cancers, such as prostate cancer.”⁶

NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH

“A new study adds to the evidence that eating red meat on a regular basis may shorten your life span. The findings suggest that meat eaters might help improve their health by substituting other healthy protein sources for some of the red meat they eat.

“One additional serving per day of unprocessed red meat over the course of the study raised the risk of total mortality by 13 percent. An extra serving of processed red meat (such as bacon, hot dogs, sausage and salami) raised the risk by 20 percent. The researchers estimated that substituting 1 serving per day of other foods—like fish, poultry, nuts, legumes, low-fat dairy and whole grains—for red meat could lower the risk of mortality by 7 percent to 19 percent.”⁷

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, INTERNATIONAL AGENCY FOR RESEARCH ON CANCER

“After thoroughly reviewing the accumulated scientific literature, a Working Group of 22 experts from 10 countries convened by the IARC Monographs Programme classified the consumption of red meat as probably carcinogenic to humans (Group 2A), based on limited evidence that the consumption of red meat causes cancer in humans and strong mechanistic evidence supporting a carcinogenic effect.

“This association was observed mainly for colorectal cancer, but associations were also seen for pancreatic cancer and prostate cancer.”⁸

ENDNOTES

- 1 U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, “Food Availability (Per Capita) Data System,” 2015, [www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-availability-\(per-capita\)-data-system/summary-findings.aspx](http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-availability-(per-capita)-data-system/summary-findings.aspx) (accessed June 28, 2016).
- 2 American Heart Association, “Meals Without Meat,” 2016, www.heart.org/HEARTORG/HealthyLiving/HealthyEating/Nutrition/Meals-Without-Meat_UCM_430994_Article.jsp?appName=MobileApp (accessed June 28, 2016).
- 3 American Institute for Cancer Research, “The Facts About Red Meat & Processed Meat,” www.aicr.org/assets/docs/pdf/brochures/red-processed-meats.pdf.
- 4 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Healthy Eating for a Healthy Weight,” 2015, www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/healthy_eating/ (accessed June 28, 2016).
- 5 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Scientific Report of the 2015 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee, Executive Summary, February 2015, health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015-scientific-report/.
- 6 National Cancer Institute, “Red Meat Consumption,” Cancer Trends Progress Report, 2015, progressreport.cancer.gov/prevention/red_meat (accessed June 28, 2016).
- 7 National Institutes of Health, “Risk in Red Meat?” NIH Research Matters, March 2012, www.nih.gov/news-events/nih-research-matters/risk-red-meat (accessed June 28, 2016).
- 8 World Health Organization, International Agency for Research on Cancer, “IARC Monographs Evaluate Consumption of Red Meat and Processed Meat,” press release no. 240, October 26, 2015, www.iarc.fr/en/media-centre/pr/2015/pdfs/pr240_E.pdf.