

Red Meat

Red meat, that staple of the American diet, could send you to an early grave.

The largest study of its kind has concluded that Americans 50 and older who eat large amounts of red meat and processed meats, including cold cuts, bacon and hot dogs, face a greater risk of early death from heart disease and cancer, reports The Associated Press. How much is a "large amount" of red meat? It's not that much at all: one-quarter pound a day or the equivalent of a hamburger.

Led by Rashmi Sinha of the National Cancer Institute, the 10-year federal study followed more than 545,000 people ages 50 to 71 years old that were part of the National Institutes of Health-AARP Diet and Health Study. During the decade-long research period, more than 70,000 of the participants died. "The bottom line is we found an association between red meat and processed meat and an increased risk of mortality," Sinha told The Washington Post.

The results:

" **Men** who ate the equivalent of a quarter-pound hamburger daily had a 22 percent higher risk of dying of cancer and a 27 percent higher risk of dying of heart disease, compared with those who ate just five ounces or less of red meat a week.

" **Women** who ate a quarter pound of red meat daily had a 20 percent higher risk of dying of cancer and a 50 percent higher risk of dying of heart disease than women who ate less.

" **People** who eat more white meat, such as chicken, turkey and fish, actually had a slightly decreased risk of death.

" **Pork** may be advertised as the "other white meat," but it can increase the risk of cancer, too, because it's high in iron.

"The uniqueness of this study is its size and length of follow-up," Barry M. Popkin, a professor of global nutrition at the University of North Carolina, who wrote an editorial accompanying the study, told the Post. "This is a slam-dunk to say that, 'Yes, indeed, if people want to be healthy and live longer, consume less red and processed meat.'"

Why is red meat so unhealthy? There are several reasons:

" When red meat is cooked, it generates compounds known to cause cancer.

" **Red meat** is high in saturated fat, which has been linked to breast and colorectal cancer.

" **Meat** is high in iron, which can also lead to cancer.

" **People** who eat red meat are more likely to have high blood pressure and high cholesterol, which boosts the risk for heart disease.

" **Processed meats**, such as bacon, cold cuts and hot dogs, contain substances known as nitrosamines, which have been linked to cancer.

The study findings were dismissed by the American Meat Institute, a trade group, which insisted the data were unreliable since they were based on self-reporting by study participants. "Meat products are part of a healthy, balanced diet, and studies show they actually provide a sense of satisfaction and fullness that can help with weight control. Proper body weight contributes to good health overall," James H. Hodges, the group's executive vice president, said in a written statement.

The research was published in the Archives of Internal Medicine.

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