

Study Links Red Meat To Cancer, Heart Disease

by PATTI NEIGHMOND

Correction March 26, 2009

We said, "Compare that tripling of risk, a 300 percent increase in death [among smokers], to what the study found about red meat — a 30 percent increase." In fact, a tripling of risk is a 200 percent increase.

March 24, 2009

text size **A A A**

Eating lots of red meat increases the chances of dying prematurely of cancer and heart disease. Previous research had found a link between red meat and an increased risk of heart disease and cancer.

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ROBERT SIEGEL, host:

A lot of research has shown that eating red meat can increase your risk of heart disease and certain cancers, especially colon cancer. Now, a large study suggests that eating a lot of those juicy burgers and steaks may actually shorten your life. NPR's Patti Neighmond looked into what that study means for meat lovers.

PATTI NEIGHMOND: This was a large study, over half a million men and women over the age of 50. They answered questions about specifics of their diet, and then researchers documented who died over the next 10 years.

They found that people who ate the most red meat - that's beef, lamb and pork -were 30 percent more likely to die from heart disease or any type of cancer.

While the study's biggest weakness is that it relied on people's memories of what they'd eaten over the previous year, epidemiologist Michael Thun, with the American Cancer Society, says the findings support what research has found over the last 20 years: Limit the amount of red meat in your diet.

Dr. □MICHAEL THUN (Epidemiologist, American Cancer Society): Choose fish, poultry or beans as an alternative. And when you eat meat, eat smaller portions, select leaner cuts, and don't consider it the main course every day or even more than one time a day. Consider it a treat.

NEIGHMOND: Which doesn't mean eliminate all red meat from your diet. While that wouldn't be a bad idea, Thun says it's okay to eat meat but, like so much else, in moderation. A few times a week is probably fine. A few times a month is better. And when you do eat red meat, he says, be careful how you cook it.

Dr. □THUN: When you heat meat, and particularly fat, at very high temperatures, you can produce a number of chemical groups that damage DNA.

NEIGHMOND: So the American Cancer Society recommends baking, broiling or poaching instead of frying or grilling. And if you do grill, they say, try microwaving meat first to reduce the fat content, and then put it on the grill.

Another problem the study found: processed meat, meats which are preserved, salted, smoked. The message here is simple, says nutritionist Barry Popkin from the University of North Carolina. Avoid them or at least, cut way back.

Dr. □BARRY POPKIN (Nutritionist, University of North Carolina): There are a bunch of people that consume a pepperoni pizza daily or a hot dog a couple times a week, and they need to really cut that down to once a month.

NEIGHMOND: In the study, the women who ate the most red meat were more likely to die from heart disease than men who ate a lot of red meat. Researchers don't know why. Epidemiologist Michael Thun says it's important to remember the risk associated with red meat is a lot less, even in fairly large quantities, than risks that result from other lifestyle choices like, for example, smoking.

Dr. □THUN: And smoking, depending on the age at which you're doing it and how long you've done it, is, say, tripling the death rate from all causes.

NEIGHMOND: Compare that tripling of risk, a 300 percent increase in death, to what the study found about red meat, a 30 percent increase.

Dr. □THUN: I mean, smoking is in a class by itself, approached only, really, by moderate to severe obesity.

NEIGHMOND: Researchers say the take-home message from the study is clear. When you do eat meat, make it mostly fish or poultry. In the study, people who ate more of these meats had the lowest death rate. Researchers don't know whether that was because something in the white meat was beneficial, like omega-3 fatty acids in fish, for example, or whether eating white meat just meant people ate less red meat. Patti Neighmond, NPR News.

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Diets Rich In Red Meat May Be Risky

by ALLISON AUBREY

iStockphoto.com

March 23, 2009

A federal study suggests that large amounts of red meat may increase the likelihood of dying from heart disease and cancer.

Eating large amounts of red meat may increase the likelihood of dying from heart disease and cancer, according to a large federal study of AARP members.



People who eat the highest levels of red meat and processed meats — such as hot dogs, bacon and cold cuts — are about 20 percent more likely to die of cancer compared with people who eat less than 5 ounces per week.

With heart disease, researchers found heavy red meat consumption increased the risk of death for men by 27 percent and for women by about 50 percent.

People whose diets included large amounts of white meat, like chicken and fish, had a lower risk of death.

The National Cancer Institute researchers say the increased risk of death is modest compared with other risk factors, such as smoking, and fit with previous research.

But Barry Popkin, director of the obesity center at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, believes the findings are still significant. "It's a lot of deaths you save if you go from eating a Whopper once a day to once a week instead," he says.

Study subjects were recruited from AARP members, a group that's healthier than other similarly aged Americans. That means the findings may not apply to all groups.

In the analysis, the researchers took into account other risk factors such as smoking, a family history of cancer and high body mass index.

The study included some 545,000 adults who were surveyed about their eating habits. The major drawback of the study is that it relies on people's memories, which are not always accurate.

The National Cattlemen's Beef Association has questioned the findings, saying it is difficult to draw conclusions based on surveys.

The findings were published in Monday's *Archives of Internal Medicine*.

Material from The Associated Press was used in this report.

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danny vogel (danielvogel) wrote:

It doesn't say if this study compared natural meats (animals untainted by chemicals, hormones, antibiotics, and all the usual bad stuff that goes with being a factory farm, including the stress of it) with meats from factory farmed animals. With the American population becoming increasingly interested in natural, untreated, food, it seems a bit disingenuous to say diets rich in red meat may be risky without including in that sentence the word "processed." I am very pro-science, but at the same time when you consider humans ate meat for millions of years and likely did not all die of today's cancer epidemic compared to other non-human omnivores, it makes you wonder if it was not the factory-farmed meat in particular and not meat in general that led to an increase in cancer rates? Amazing that the National Cancer Institute will interview half a million people and not rule out this most important variable, especially given the interest in natural versus processed foods in today's culture!

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