

News Release



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“Seven ages” study shows red meat benefits

Red meat plays a vital role in human nutrition whatever stage of life you are at, a new study has confirmed.

A team of experts studied data from 103 previous scientific papers on red meat and nutrition to produce [Micronutrient challenges across the age spectrum: is there a role for red meat in the diet?](#) which is being published in the British Nutrition Foundation’s Nutrition Bulletin.

The researchers say that including red meat as a staple of your diet, whatever your age, can help cut the gap between recommended intakes of essential minerals and the current lower rates for many people, while helping to boost the immune system and stimulate cognitive function.

Dietitian Dr Carrie Ruxton, co-author of the report, said: “Meat has long played a central role in the human diet and is now recognised as an important source of high-quality protein and essential micronutrients. The research indicates that even in developed countries such as the UK, with a plentiful food supply, there is evidence of under-consumption of key vitamins and minerals which support long-term health. It is notable that many of these are present in red meat, such as iron, vitamin A, vitamin D, selenium, magnesium, potassium and zinc.

“Integrating red meat into diets across the age spectrum, from infancy to old age, may help to narrow the present gap between intakes and recommendations. In addition, there is emerging evidence that nutrients commonly found in red meat may play a role in supporting cognitive function, immune health, and addressing iron deficiency.

“Moderate amounts of lean red meat provide a wide range of important nutrients, without substantially increasing intakes of energy and saturated fat. When consumed in moderate amounts as part of a balanced diet, lean meat is unlikely to increase the risk of chronic disease yet provides an important source of micronutrients. In addition, people who eat lean meat regularly tend to eat more vegetables, fruits, low-fat dairy products and have a higher intake of nutrients overall, suggesting that inclusion of red meat does not displace other important foods.”

The paper, funded through EBLEX and BPEX’s meat and health programme, showed red meat’s benefits to individuals across the “seven ages”:

- Infants and pre-school children - studies show that diets in this age group are low in vitamin A, vitamin D, iron, zinc.
- Pre-pubescent children – diets were found to be low in vitamin A, magnesium, iron and zinc. Boys tended to have higher intakes of iron and thiamin than girls.
- Teenagers (13 to 18 years) – diets are low in many key nutrients - including vitamin A, vitamin D, iron, magnesium, zinc, selenium and potassium.

- Adults of reproductive age (19-50 years) – diets, particularly for females, fall short in magnesium and iron, as well as zinc, selenium and potassium.
- Pregnancy and lactation - Women on average fail to get enough calcium, magnesium, iron, iodine, selenium and potassium and vitamin D.
- Middle-age and older age (50 years and above) – while this group has a better quality diet, there are still shortfalls in intakes of magnesium, zinc and potassium.
- Older-age (75 years and beyond) – data shows that in adults aged over 85, intakes of magnesium, zinc and potassium are below the recommended nutrient intake.

Maureen Strong, EBLEX and BPEX nutrition manager, said: “While some studies have linked high levels of meat consumption with health issues, the evidence is inconsistent and the research varies in its quality – for instance one paper that found a link between meat and obesity included pies and pastries as well as lean cuts of meat.

“Indeed, other research found that lean meat consumption does not impact on risk of chronic disease. Chemicals called heterocyclic amines may be produced when meat is cooked or charred and these have been linked with an increased cancer risk. However, there is also evidence that meat contains nutrients with anticancer properties.

“In addition, older studies may not be so relevant today as the fat content of meat has reduced considerably over the past few decades as a result of changes in breeding and animal feeding practices.”

You can read more about red meat and the seven ages of man [here](#).

Ends

Notes for editors

The authors of the report are independent dietitian Dr Carrie Ruxton, Emma Derbyshire, Senior Lecturer in Human Nutrition, Manchester Metropolitan University, and Prof Robert Pickard, Emeritus Professor of Neurobiology, University of Cardiff.

Many of the previous studies analysed drew from the UK National Diet and Nutrition Survey (NDNS) – now an annual rolling programme which provides a valuable insight into the nutritional quality of modern diets.

Red meat – defined as beef, veal, pork and lamb, which is fresh, minced or frozen – is a source of high quality protein and important micronutrients. Beef and lamb are classed as a ‘rich source’ – more than 30% of the recommended daily allowance (RDA) - of vitamin B3 (niacin), B12 (cyanocobalamin) and zinc. It is also a ‘source’ – 15% or more of the RDA – of iron, potassium and phosphorus.

Meat, particularly from grass-fed animals, can be a valuable source of long chain (LC) n-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFA) such as omega 3 fatty acids. Research shows that these fatty acids support normal foetal development as well as help lower the risk of inflammatory conditions, depression and dementia in later life.

Red meat is also an important source of haem iron - a type that is readily absorbed - and data shows that average iron intakes in the UK are inadequate, especially among females in general and during pregnancy. Find out more about meat and health at <http://meatandhealth.redmeatinfo.com/>

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EBLEX is the organisation for beef and lamb levy payers in England, and is a division of the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB).

It exists to enhance the profitability of the English beef and lamb sector. Its aims are:

- To help the beef and lamb supply chain to be more efficient
- To help the beef and lamb meat industry to add value.

Find out more at www.eblex.org.uk

For more information, please contact James Wilde, in the EBLEX press office, on 024 7647 8835 or via james.wilde@eblex.ahdb.org.uk