

Red Meat: To Eat or Not To Eat

Dr. Carl E. Orringer, director of Preventive Cardiovascular Medicine at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, urges the public to read the new recommendations on red-meat consumption before following them.

For years, Americans have heard the same drumbeat from the American Heart Association, the American Cancer Association, and U.S. Dietary Guidelines: Limit your consumption of red and processed meats, and you'll reduce your risk of heart disease, cancer, and other maladies.

But last week, an international collaboration of researchers from seven countries issued a set of papers that suggests there's not enough scientific evidence behind such advice, and it need not be followed. Researchers with the Nutritional Recommendations (NutriRECS) Consortium concluded that the health benefits of eating less beef, pork and lamb, or ham, bacon, and sausage are so small that they can be detected only when looking at studies of very large groups—which is not nearly enough to tell individuals to change their meat-eating habits.

Published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, the analyses were condemned by a number of groups, including the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, which, calling the report “a major disservice to public health,” filed a petition with the Federal Trade Commission to “correct false statements” contained in it.

Here he answers five questions for [News@theU](#). To sort out the conflicting messages, Dr. Carl E. Orringer, the director of Preventive Cardiovascular Medicine at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, urges members of the public to actually read [the report](#), rather than the headlines about it.



What was your personal reaction to the NutriRECS report, which appears to overturn a bedrock dietary recommendation for good health?

My personal reaction is that we all need to read the article and conclusions carefully. The authors state, as the last part of their summary, that their recommendation for continuing current consumption of red and processed meat is “weak” and that the level of evidence is of “low certainty.” That speaks for itself.

Do you see problems with the research?

To reach their conclusions, the researchers used an evidence-rating system that is usually used to evaluate the safety and effectiveness of drugs, rather than lifestyle issues. So one could argue that a different system of grading the evidence might have been better in this particular case.

Is there evidence that contradicts the NutriRECS conclusions?

Large and well-accepted databases, like the National Health and Nutrition Survey, have provided evidence that reduced red meat consumption may have a significant

impact on reducing death. There is also a body of sound evidence that limited consumption of fatty cuts of beef, dark meat poultry, processed foods of all types, sugary beverages, candy and pastries is likely to have long-term beneficial effects on health, weight, disease risk, and health complications, particularly in those who are predisposed to health problems based on their genetic predisposition to those disorders.

What will you tell patients who ask you to sort out the conflicting messages about red-meat consumption?

I will remind them that I make recommendations about diet based on an individual's health, medical history, and specific characteristics. The evidence is that small amounts of lean, red meat consumption as part of a well-balanced diet is unlikely to provide significant harms in most people.

Are you saying recommendations on meat consumptions should be tailored to the individual, not to large-scale populations?

There are individual susceptibilities to the adverse effects of red and processed meat that cannot be accounted for by large-scale recommendations for the population. For example, those who carry multiple risk factors for heart disease, diabetes, or cancer may be predisposed to the adverse consequences of consuming diets that are high in dietary cholesterol, saturated fat, or the cancer-causing effects of nitrates—which are added to processed meat as a preservative.

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