

# Dietary fat linked to pancreatic cancer

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High intake of dietary fats from red meat and dairy products was associated with an increased risk of pancreatic cancer, according to a new study published online June 26 in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*.

This study was undertaken because research relating fat intake to [pancreatic cancer](#) was inconclusive.

To examine the association, Rachael Z. Stolzenberg-Solomon, Ph.D., of the Division of Cancer Epidemiology and Genetics at the National Cancer Institute in Bethesda, Md., and colleagues analyzed a cohort of over 500,000 people from the National Institutes of Health - AARP Diet and Health Study. Participants completed a food frequency questionnaire in 1995 and 1996 and were followed prospectively for an average of 6 years to track a variety of health outcomes, including pancreatic cancer.

Men and women who consumed high amounts of total fats had 53% and 23% higher relative rates of pancreatic cancer, respectively, compared with men and women who had the lowest fat consumption. Participants who consumed high amounts of saturated fats had 36% higher relative rates of pancreatic cancer compared with those who consumed low amounts.

"[W]e observed positive associations between pancreatic cancer and intakes of total, saturated, and monounsaturated fat overall, particularly from red meat and dairy food sources. We did not observe any

consistent association with polyunsaturated or fat from plant food sources," the authors write. "Altogether, these results suggest a role for animal fat in pancreatic carcinogenesis."

In an accompanying editorial, Brian M. Wolpin, M.D., MPH, of the Dana Farber Cancer Institute in Boston and Meir J. Stampfer, M.D., DrPH, of the Harvard School of Public Health, call the study well-performed and a good addition to the understanding of pancreatic cancer.

They do note, however, that there is insufficient epidemiological and laboratory evidence to confirm the importance of animal fats or even that meat is the important factor, as opposed to other dietary or lifestyle preferences associated with meat consumption.

"[W]ith further investigation, this work has the potential to provide interesting clues to the mechanisms underlying pancreatic tumorigenesis," the editorialists write.

More information:

Article: Theibaut et al. Dietary Fatty Acids and Pancreatic Cancer in the NIH-AARP Diet and Health Study. *J Natl Cancer Inst* 2009, 101: 1001-1011.

Editorial: Wolpin B and Stampfer M. D. Defining Determinants of Pancreatic Cancer Risk: Are We Making Progress. *J Natl Cancer Inst* 2009, 101: 972-973.

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