

Meat, fish and ovarian cancer risk

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(PhysOrg.com) -- What do meat, fish and ovarian cancer have in common? More than you would think, says Dr Penny Webb from the Queensland Institute of Medical Research (QIMR).

“Our research suggests that women who eat processed meat several times a week have about a 20% higher risk of developing ovarian cancer than women who eat processed meat less than once a week,” said Dr Webb, who heads the Gynaecological Cancer Group at QIMR.

“Conversely, it appears that women who eat more [poultry](#) and fish may have a 10-15% lower risk of developing ovarian cancer than those who eat less poultry or fish.”

The study combined new results from two Australian studies (including data from over 4,000 women) with the results from other studies conducted around the world.

Dr Webb said researchers are still not sure how diet affects [cancer risk](#). “There are many theories, but there is no evidence yet. Processed meat contains compounds that could damage [cells](#) and thereby cause cancer. On the other hand, the omega-3 fatty acids found in fish are thought to be good for health in many ways and may possess anti-cancer properties.”

Dr Webb stressed this did not mean that women should immediately stop eating processed meat. “Our results are further evidence that women should aim for a healthy diet with less processed meat and higher levels

of poultry and [fish](#).”

Ovarian cancer is the sixth most common cancer in women worldwide. There are 1,200 cases of ovarian cancer in Australia each year, resulting in almost 900 deaths.

“It is important to note that ovarian cancer is a relatively rare disease. This means that, in [Australia](#), the risk of developing [ovarian cancer](#) before the age of 75 for a woman who eats a lot of processed meat is about 1% compared to about 0.8% for those who eat little processed meat,” said Dr Webb.

“This research helps to improve our understanding of this silent, yet deadly disease. Ultimately, we hope to be able to reduce the number of women who are affected through better diagnostics and prevention strategies.”

Provided by Queensland Institute of Medical Research

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