

Nutrition data review shows red meat has neutral effect on cardiovascular disease risk factors

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Consuming red meat in amounts above what is typically recommended does not affect short-term cardiovascular disease risk factors, such as blood pressure and blood cholesterol, according to a new review of clinical trials from Purdue University.

"During the last 20 years, there have been recommendations to eat less red meat as part of a healthier diet, but our research supports that red meat can be incorporated into a healthier diet," said Wayne Campbell, professor of nutrition science. "Red meat is a nutrient-rich food, not only as a source for protein but also bioavailable iron."

The recommendations to limit red meat from the diet come mainly from studies that relate peoples' eating habits to whether they have cardiovascular disease. While these studies suggest that [red meat consumption](#) is associated with a higher risk of cardiovascular disease, they are not designed to show that red meat is causing cardiovascular disease. So Campbell, doctoral student Lauren O'Connor, and postdoctoral researcher Jung Eun Kim, conducted a review and analysis of past [clinical trials](#), which are able to detect cause and effect between [eating habits](#) and health risks. They screened hundreds of related research articles, focusing on studies that met specific criteria including the amount of red meat consumed, evaluation of [cardiovascular disease risk](#) factors and study design. An analysis of the 24 studies that met the criteria is published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*.

"We found that consuming more than half a serving per day of red meat, which is equivalent to a 3 ounce serving three times per week, did not worsen [blood pressure](#) and blood total cholesterol, HDL, LDL and triglyceride concentrations, which are commonly screened by health-care providers," O'Connor said.

This research includes all types of [red meat](#), mostly unprocessed beef and pork.

Campbell also said more analysis is needed as the evaluation of blood pressure and cholesterol are not the sole determinants for someone to develop cardiovascular disease. For example, the length of time these experiments were done ranged from a few weeks to a few months as opposed to the years or decades that it could take people to develop cardiovascular disease or have a cardiovascular event.

"It is also important to recognize that our findings are specific to selected indicators for [cardiovascular disease](#) risk," Campbell said.

"Comparable research is needed to assess other health risk factors from clinical trials, including inflammation and blood glucose control."

More information: L. E. O'Connor et al, Total red meat intake of ≥ 0.5 servings/d does not negatively influence cardiovascular disease risk factors: a systemically searched meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials, *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* (2016). [DOI: 10.3945/ajcn.116.142521](https://doi.org/10.3945/ajcn.116.142521)

Provided by Purdue University

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