

Study finds obesity may outweigh meat consumption as driver of inflammation

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Credit: University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Red and processed meat – considered prime suspects in disease-related inflammation – might actually be aiding and abetting another culprit, says a recent study led by a University of Nebraska-Lincoln researcher.

The investigation turned up incriminating evidence against body fat, which statistical analyses suggest could account for much of the

correlation between meat consumption and an [inflammatory protein](#) linked with higher risk of certain cancers.

Lead researcher Weiwen Chai and her colleagues likewise found that meat consumption's influence on elevated levels of an inflammatory hormone – and decreases in an anti-inflammatory counterpart – could be largely predicted by the height-to-weight ratio known as [body mass index](#).

Though the study's design prevented them from drawing causal conclusions, the authors said their findings may indicate that eating meat contributes to disease-related inflammation mostly by increasing weight and body fat. If so, limiting fat stores could prove most important to combating inflammation that prior research has linked with the onset and spread of multiple diseases, the study reported.

"We tried to see: If there is a pathway between meat and cancer, is this pathway mediated by some other factors?" said Chai, assistant professor of nutrition and health sciences. "It's just one study, but we think that body fat seems more relevant toward those [inflammation markers](#) than just red or processed meat."

The team reached its conclusions after comparing self-reports of meat consumption with blood samples from a diverse, cancer-free cohort of 312 men and 911 women. Though the researchers initially found suggestive correlations between [meat consumption](#) and the inflammatory biomarkers, those correlations dropped substantially after statistically accounting for body mass index.

With growing evidence that [inflammatory markers](#) can induce or accelerate certain cancers – and increasing interest in whether eating meat may contribute to them – Chai said the study represents one of several that have recently reinforced [body fat](#) and obesity as major risk

factors.

Chai and colleagues from the University of Hawaii, University of Southern California and Cedars-Sinai Medical Center reported their findings in the *Journal of the American College of Nutrition*.

More information: Weiwen Chai et al. Dietary Red and Processed Meat Intake and Markers of Adiposity and Inflammation: The Multiethnic Cohort Study, *Journal of the American College of Nutrition* (2017). [DOI: 10.1080/07315724.2017.1318317](https://doi.org/10.1080/07315724.2017.1318317)

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