

Mediterranean-style eating with lean, unprocessed red meat improves heart disease risk

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Adopting a Mediterranean-style eating pattern improves heart health, with or without reducing red meat intake, if the red meat consumed is lean and unprocessed, according to a Purdue University nutrition study by Wayne W. Campbell, professor of nutrition science. Credit: Purdue University

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"This study is important because it shows that red [meat](#) can be part of a heart-healthy eating [pattern](#) like a Mediterranean-style eating pattern," said Wayne W. Campbell, professor of nutrition science. "This study was not designed to promote red meat intake, and we are not encouraging people who otherwise consume a vegetarian-style eating pattern to begin consuming red meat."

The study is published online at the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. It was funded by the Beef Checkoff and the Pork Checkoff, with support from the National Institutes of Health's Indiana Clinical and Translational Sciences Institute and a National Institutes of Health pre-doctoral training grant through the Ingestive Behavior Research Center at Purdue.

"Most healthy eating pattern recommendations include a broad statement to reduce red meat intake," said Lauren E. O'Connor, lead author and recent doctoral degree recipient. "Our study compared Mediterranean-style eating patterns with red meat intake that is typical in the United States, about 3 ounces per day, versus a commonly recommended intake amount that is 3 ounces twice per week. Overall, heart health indicators improved with both Mediterranean-style eating patterns. Interestingly, though, participants' LDL cholesterol, which is one of the strongest predictors we have to predict the development of cardiovascular disease, improved with typical but not lower red meat intake."

The study assessed the health-promoting effects of a Mediterranean-style eating pattern, without intended weight loss, for adults who are overweight and at risk for developing heart disease. All 41 study participants—28 females and 13 males—completed three study phases.

The phases included a five-week period of consuming a Mediterranean-style eating pattern containing three ounces per day of lean, unprocessed red meat, an amount of red meat the typical United States resident consumes; a five-week return to their regular eating pattern; and a five-week period of consuming a Mediterranean-style eating pattern with less red meat, three ounces twice weekly, which is commonly recommended for heart health. The order of the typical and lower red meat interventions were randomly assigned among participants.

"It's also very encouraging that the improvements these people experienced—which included improvements in blood pressure, blood lipids and lipoproteins—were noticeable in five weeks," Campbell said.

The Mediterranean-style eating pattern, which was ranked No. 1 by Consumer Reports, is recommended by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. A Mediterranean-style eating pattern has clinically proven effects on health especially related to heart [health](#) and risks for heart disease such as [heart](#) attack or stroke.

"The composition of a Mediterranean-style eating pattern varies across countries and cultures," Campbell said. "What is common across most Mediterranean regions is consumption of olive oil, fruit, vegetables and legumes, but protein sources depend on what country and geographic region. If they live on the coast, they will eat more seafood, but if they live inland they will eat more [red meat](#)."

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More information: Lauren E O'Connor et al, A Mediterranean-style eating pattern with lean, unprocessed red meat has cardiometabolic benefits for adults who are overweight or obese in a randomized, crossover, controlled feeding trial, *The American Journal of Clinical*

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Provided by Purdue University

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