

# On Nutrition: The pros and cons of pork

May 6 2022, by Barbara Intermill

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Valerie T writes: "I am emailing you on the request of my dad who is 88 and has several health issues. He read what you had to say about beef and fish. He wanted to know about pork and the pros and cons of it. He

has diabetes, heart problems, circulatory problems due to the diabetes, kidney problems due to the diabetes, and arthritis. So just being a good daughter and emailing you. Thank you for your time Barbara!"

You certainly are a good daughter, Valerie! And while I cannot give specific medical nutrition advice in this column, I'm happy to answer your dad's inquiry.

Although sometimes called "the other white meat," [pork](#) is actually a red meat. That means it contains more myoglobin—a protein that holds oxygen in muscles—than chicken or fish. Other red meats are beef, lamb, veal and venison.

To its credit, pork is a nutrient-dense food. It provides a good dose of high quality protein, iron, zinc and vitamins B6 and B12. Pork's protein helps manage blood sugars, maintains muscle strength and enhances the immune system.

Depending on the severity of your dad's [kidney disease](#), however, he may need to limit the amount of protein he eats. Too much protein is hard on damaged kidneys.

Like beef, today's pork is much lower in fat than it was a few decades ago. If your dad enjoys pork, have him look for loin cuts, which are especially lean. Pork tenderloin, for example, can be lower in calories and saturated fat than chicken breast.

In fact, pork tenderloin and sirloin now carry the American Heart Association's Heart Check stamp that designates a food is not only a good source of beneficial nutrients but is also low in sodium and saturated fats.

Studies have shown that lean pork can be included in an overall healthful

diet and not be a detriment to heart health. A recent study found that adding two to three servings a week of lean pork to a Mediterranean-style diet ([olive oil](#), fish, legumes, nuts and lots of fruits and veggies) improved [blood pressure](#) and other signs of heart health as much as a typical low-fat diet.

The biggest "con" about pork involves some of the foods we hold near and dear: bacon, sausage and hot dogs. These are processed meats which—if eaten regularly—have been implicated in myriad health risks, including cancer. Best if your dad keeps his intake of these foods to a minimum.

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