

Testing the role of meat consumption in cardiovascular disease

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In February 1977, in the midst of a heart disease epidemic, a U.S. senate select committee encouraged people to eat less meat. Within the year, however, possibly due to pressure from the meat industry, the committee shifted its advice, placing more emphasis on reducing saturated fat. Over the last 45 years, researchers have accumulated high-quality evidence

suggesting that saturated fat has no effect on cardiovascular or overall mortality.

To further investigate the role of meat consumption in ischemic heart disease, CUNY SPH Professor Mary Schooling and colleagues led a study published in *BMC Medicine* testing L-carnitine, a biomarker of meat intake, using a [study design](#) similar to a randomized controlled trial, taking advantage of genetic randomization.

The study found L-carnitine to be positively associated with [ischemic heart disease](#), particularly in men. These findings help explain the higher rates of heart disease in men, as well as substantiating the original dietary advice to decrease consumption of meat. Given the ecological footprint of meat consumption, Schooling says, following this advice could also reduce dietary environmental impacts.

"Reducing meat consumption could be a means of improving planetary and men's health," Schooling says. "Identifying the sex-specific underlying drivers/consequences of L-carnitine could inform identification of further interventions."

More information: Jie V. Zhao et al, l-carnitine, a friend or foe for cardiovascular disease? A Mendelian randomization study, *BMC Medicine* (2022). [DOI: 10.1186/s12916-022-02477-z](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12916-022-02477-z)

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