

## Saturated Fat in Red Meat is damaging



Written by Dr. Harold Gunatillake FRCS, MB, BS, FIACS, FICS, AM (Sing)  
-retired General & Cosmetic Surgeon-Health writer

More saturated fat is found in beef, pork, and lamb, than in chicken and fish. Most of the fat in chicken is in the skin, and has had a bad rap, but this is considered as healthy fat, and flavourful. According to the Harvard School of Public Health most of the fat in chicken skin is unsaturated and seems to lower bad cholesterol in your blood and lowers your blood pressure.

It is also found that leaner animal products, such as chicken breast or pork loin, have less saturated fat.

A paper published in the Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health, researchers from Oxford University has found that chicken consumption is associated with a higher risk of non-Hodgkin lymphoma, a type of blood cancer, and also seem to increase the chance of prostate cancer in men.

Is it good to eat chicken daily, as it is the cheapest form of meat available for human consumption in any country? Yes, so long as you use the right cooking methods, such as boiling, grilling, roasting or baking. It is frying that leads to various health problems. Have you noticed that most restaurant foods are fried, and cookery demonstrations seen on TV seems to be similar? It is all focussed on the added taste that frying provides.

The most damaging fats in meat are saturated fats, mainly found in animal products such as red meat. Trans-fat created by adding hydrogen is also found in cooked meat products.

You do not have to cut down red meat totally and become a vegetarian, but consuming meat in reduced quantities minimises the bad effects of eating meat.

Keep consuming meat to a minimum. Try to keep the total amount of meat in your diet to no more than fifteen percent of your total calories. Ten percent is even better.

Eat red meat only occasionally. Red meat is high in saturated fat, so eat it sparingly.

Reduce the portion size of meat in each meal. The portion should be able to fit in the palm of your hand. Trim the fat off meat when you do eat it.

After all red meat is an excellent source of protein and essential nutrients such as iron, zinc, vitamin B12 and even omega-3 fats linked to heart and brain health. It was headlined once that it is okay to eat red meat. The source for this statement was a study published online Oct.1, 2019, in *Annals of Internal Medicine*.

The statement issued by an international team of researchers conducting five systematic reviews found “low” evidence that either red meat or processed meat intake for health reasons.

This evidence was disputed by Dr. Frank Hu, chair of the Department of Nutrition, Harvard School of Medicine. He said that the new red meat and processed meat recommendation was based on flawed methodology and misinterpretation of nutritional evidence.

The accepted evidence today is that red and processed meats do increase health risks, such as higher risk of heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and premature death.



Image credit, Courtesy of Ayubowan (World ASIA)

**Sri Lankan Staple Diet**

According to Dr. Hu, instead using red meat as the main course, use red meat as a side dish.

Sri Lankans are doing right, because in their staple diet meat is served as a curry with lot of gravy, and a few pieces of ridiculously small cut meat is consumed at a time, paired with other curries.

The central feature of Sri Lankan home cooked food is boiled or steamed rice, served with a curry of fish and chicken, along with other curries made with vegetables, lentils, chutneys and sambols. There is the ideal balance of food groups on one's plate.

### **Fats in meat increase cancer risk**

Studies have shown that eating red meat and saturated fats frequently, increases the chance of your getting cancer. The fat in animal foods can increase hormone levels in the blood, and the pesticides and hormones found in some of these foods may also fuel cancer growth. Animal foods are also devoid of fibre, and low-fibre diets are associated with a higher risk of cancer.

With processed meat such as sausages, there is much stronger evidence for cancer including heart disease.

### **Fats that decrease cancer risk**

The best fats are unsaturated fats, which come from plant sources and are liquid at room temperature. Primary sources include olive oil, canola oil, nuts, and avocados. Also focus on omega-3 fatty acids, which fight inflammation and support brain and heart health. Good sources include salmon, tuna, and flaxseeds.

Coconut fat though saturated is quite safe and healthy.

Limit fast food, fried foods, and packaged foods, which tend to be high in Trans fats. This includes foods like potato chips, cookies, crackers, French fries, and doughnuts. Eat fish more often than red meat. It is wise to eat a balanced diet with low meat consumption like in the Mediterranean type of diet.

### **Saturated fats linked to heart disease**

Eating saturated fat raises the cholesterol level in your blood and your calorie intake. Evidence shows that eating foods with high cholesterol and low saturated fat like eggs do not raise the cholesterol level in the blood. This too is now disputed, especially when it comes to diabetic diets.

Eating food with high saturated fat like meat raises the cholesterol level in the blood, because the liver converts the saturated fat into cholesterol.

Saturated fats occur naturally in many foods. The majority come mainly from animal sources, including meat and dairy products. The American Heart Association recommends consuming 5% to 6% of calories from saturated fat. That means, for example, if you need about 2,000 calories a day, no more than 120 of them should come from saturated fats. That is about 13 grams of saturated fats a day.

Some researchers hold the view that saturated fats do not cause heart disease, although most in the mainstream medical communities hold that saturated fat is a risk factor for CVD, some hold contrary beliefs.

Bottomline:

Eat red meat and others sparingly. Eat more fish, fruits, and veggies ad lib.

Sri Lankan staple diet is a compromise.

Good health Stay safe.

Hope this article was useful.