

Eating Guidelines for Cancer Prevention: Meat, Nitrates and Barbequing

Eating well is one thing you can do to lower your risk of getting cancer. A diet high in red and processed meat has been shown to increase risk of colon and rectal cancer. Eating red and processed meats may promote the formation of cancer causing compounds that cause damage to the colon lining.

Many processed meats also contain nitrates or nitrites. These food additives are important for preventing botulism and also give processed meat their typical colour and flavour. Nitrates or nitrites may form cancer-causing compounds in our bodies.

Grilled (broiled) or barbequed animal foods may increase cancer risk. When meats are cooked at very high temperatures and when fat from animal foods drips onto hot flames causing flare-ups, cancer causing compounds may be formed.



Steps you can take

Eat less red and processed meat.

- Limit red meat (beef, pork, lamb and goat) to no more than 500 g (16 ½ oz) cooked weight per week. Red meat can still be part of a healthy diet. It's a good source of iron, protein, vitamin B12 and zinc.
- When choosing red meat, select lean cuts, trim away any visible fat before cooking and keep portions sizes small.
- Eat vegetarian meals more often. Look at vegetarian cookbooks in your local library, or search on the internet for vegetarian recipes.
- Choose fish, seafood, poultry, tofu or beans and lentils instead of red meat. Eat at least two servings of fish each week.

- Eat very little, if any, cured or smoked meat. Examples include ham, bacon, sausage, salami, hotdogs, and bologna.

If you choose to eat processed meat at all, save it for special occasions like ham at Christmas or the occasional hot dog at a hockey game.

- Choose wild meat instead of meat that is raised for food. Wild meat does not appear to have the same risk as red and processed meat.

NOTE: Use low temperature cooking methods for meat, such as steaming, stewing and baking instead of high temperature cooking methods like frying, broiling and barbequing.

When barbequing, keep the following tips in mind:

- Choose lean meat and trim visible fat — this helps reduce flare ups from the fat dripping onto the open flame.
- Cook smaller meat portions, like kabobs, which will spend less time on the grill.
- Try precooking meat by microwaving, boiling or baking. Finish cooking on the barbeque to add flavour.
- Marinate the meat. Studies show that this can reduce the amount of cancer causing substances produced by barbequing by 80-90 %. A half-cup of marinade per pound is recommended.
- Avoid flare-ups by using tongs (which do not pierce the meat) instead of a fork for turning and by having a water bottle on hand to extinguish flare-ups if they do happen.
- Grill at lower temperatures and turn your meat often.
- Remove all charred or burned portions before you eat.
- Barbeque vegetables instead of meat. This adds flavour to your meal. Barbequing vegetables does not increase cancer risk.



Additional Resources

- Health Canada "Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide - Tips for Meat and Alternatives" www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/choose-choix/meat-viande/tips-trucs-eng.php
- Canadian Cancer Society www.cancer.ca
- American Institute of Cancer Research www.aicr.org

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Notes

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