



## Red meat, processed meat and cancer: your questions answered

Are you eating too much red or processed meat?

Current research shows that there are certain chemicals in red and processed meats – both added and naturally occurring – that cause these foods to be carcinogenic. But what this means can cause confusion.

Here are some of the most common questions to help you sort fact from fiction.

### What are 'red' and 'processed' meats?

'Red' meat refers to all mammalian muscle meat, including, beef, veal, pork, lamb, mutton, horse, and goat.

'Processed' meat refers to meat that has been transformed through salting, curing, fermentation, smoking, or other processes to enhance flavour or improve preservation, such as salami, bacon, sausages and ham.

## **Why do red and processed meats increase your risk of cancer?**

The consumption of red meat and processed meat is convincingly associated with a modest increased risk of bowel cancer. There is more limited evidence suggesting that processed meat is associated with oesophageal, lung, stomach and prostate cancer.

Cooking meat at high temperatures, such as grilling or barbequing, can also create chemicals in the meat that may increase the risk of cancer. These chemicals are generally produced in higher levels in red and processed meat compared to other meats.

Cancer Council recommends you limit or avoid processed meats, which are also high in fat and salt.

## **Does red meat still have a place in a healthy diet?**

Red meat is an important source of protein, iron, zinc and vitamin B12, but it's the overconsumption of it is where there is cause for concern.

The Australian Guide to Healthy Eating recommends we eat moderate amounts of red meat; around 65g of cooked lean red meat each day or a larger portion three to four times a week to around 500g in total.

## **What steps can I take to reduce my cancer risk?**

If you're having processed meat more than once a week, it's time to cut back.

Try swapping ham for chicken at lunchtime, or opt for a salad with eggs, beans or lentils as your protein source. Or, swap in mushrooms, eggplant, or capsicum for a flavour boost to your pizza and pasta dishes, instead of prosciutto and pepperoni.

Take a look at how much red meat you're eating each week, too, reducing your portion to the recommended serving size, and increasing the amount of vegetables.

Cutting back on the amount of red and processed meat, and avoiding charred meat, is one simple step you can take today to reduce your risk of getting cancer in the future.