Too Much Processed Meat Ups Heart Disease and Death Risk

Consuming excessive amounts of processed meat weekly raises the risk for heart disease by 46% and death by 51%.

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Hot dogs, sausages and pepperoni may be tasty treats, but they contain a variety of unhealthy preservatives and flavorings. New findings published in The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition suggest that eating these processed meats increases a person's risk of developing heart disease and dying, reports McMaster University.

For the global study, researchers collected data on the meat-eating practices and cardiovascular illnesses of more than 134,000 people from 21 countries. Food frequency questionnaires were used to record participants' dietary habits, and participants were followed for about 10 years.

Overall, scientists recorded 7,789 deaths and 6,976 cardiovascular events. Researchers found that people who consumed 150 grams or more of processed meat had a 46% higher risk for cardiovascular disease and a 51% greater risk for death compared with people who didn't consume any processed meat.

Findings also showed that consuming unprocessed meats in moderation had a neutral effect on health, so including small amounts of these meats in an otherwise healthy diet shouldn't be harmful.

In addition, more research could help build on what's understood about the connection between eating meat and health outcomes. Investigators are interested in learning what participants ate to reduce their meat consumption and whether the quality of these foods varied between countries.

However, the big takeaway is simple: People should limit how much processed meat they eat.

For related coverage, read "Protein Substitutions" and "Should Hospitals Ban Bacon to Reduce Cancer Risk?"

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