

Two recently published studies indicate that high consumption of processed red meat may increase risk of hypertension and decrease survival. While non-processed red meat consumption was not associated with significant increases in mortality risk or hypertension.

Differences in health risks associated with processed versus non-processed red meat

High levels of red meat consumption have been associated with increased risk of cardiovascular disease and mortality. This association is partly explained by the negative effect of processed meat consumption, which is widely established. However, the role of non-processed meat in disease risk and survival is less clear.

Two different research studies published online in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* looked at possible differences in health effects of processed versus non-processed red meat consumption. French researchers evaluated the relation between the consumption of unprocessed and processed red meat and hypertension, and Swedish researchers examined the combined association of processed and non-processed meat consumption with survival in a large Swedish population.

The first study included 44,616 disease-free French women who responded to a validated dietary questionnaire. After adjusting for other known risk factors, women who consumed ≥ 5 servings of processed red meat/week (50 g = 1 serving) had a 17% higher rate of hypertension than that of women who consumed < 1 serving/week. Researchers found no association between unprocessed red meat consumption and hypertension.

In the second study, red meat consumption was analyzed in 74,645 Swedish adults who were followed for 15 years. Compared with no consumption, consumption of red meat > 100 grams/day was progressively associated with shorter survival—up to 2 y for subjects consuming an average of 300 grams/day. Compared with no consumption, high consumption of processed red meat (100 grams/day) was associated with shorter survival. High and moderate intakes of non-processed red meat were associated with shorter survival only when intakes of processed red meat were also high.

The results of both studies show that high total red meat consumption may be associated with shorter survival and increased hypertension, primarily due to the consumption of processed red meat. Moderate consumption of non-processed red meat alone was not associated with hypertension or shorter survival.

Martin Lajous et al. Processed and unprocessed red meat consumption and hypertension in women. First published July 30, 2014, doi: 10.3945/ajcn.113.080598 Am J Clin Nutr September 2014 ajcn.080598

Andrea Bellavia et al. Differences in survival associated with processed and with nonprocessed red meat consumption. First published July 16, 2014, doi: 10.3945/ajcn.114.086249

