

Public Health Consensus on Eating More Plant-based Foods and Less Meat

An impressive list of health and nutrition organizations (including the U.S. government) encourage reduced red and processed meat consumption and/or plant-based eating as part of a healthy diet:

- The American Medical Association [passed](#) a resolution in 2017 recommending that hospitals offer patients plant-based meals and eliminate processed meats entirely. In 2020, the [AMA](#) noted that “Black Americans are at particularly high risk for prostate cancer, colorectal cancer, and cardiovascular mortality, and prostate and colorectal cancers are strongly linked to dairy, processed meat, and red meat consumption. Such products also contribute to cardiovascular risk and are not nutritionally indicated for all diets.”¹
- [Kaiser Permanente](#), the nation’s largest healthcare network, encourages its physicians to recommend a plant-based diet to patients struggling with chronic illnesses such as heart disease, diabetes, high cholesterol and high blood pressure.
- The [American Cancer Society](#) has long recommended “a diet that limits processed meat and red meat, and that is high in vegetables, fruits, and whole grains.”^{2 3}
- [The American Institute for Cancer Research](#) recommends eating a plant-based diet to reduce the risk of cancer, and avoiding processed meat and limiting all other meats to 18 ounces a week.
- The [Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics](#) found that a vegetarian diet is best for health and the environment, and that adopting such diets in childhood can reduce the risk of chronic disease later in life. It also found that consumption of processed meats like ham, bacon and hot dogs, which are often high in saturated fat and sodium, [should be limited](#).
- The American Heart Association proclaims that “less meat decreases risk of: heart disease, stroke, obesity, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, Type 2 diabetes, and many cancers.”⁴
- The World Health Organization’s International Agency for Research on Cancer classified processed meat as a known human carcinogen and red meat, including beef and lamb, as a [probable human carcinogen](#) in 2015.⁵
- The American College of Lifestyle Medicine recommends that people “choose predominantly whole, plant-based foods that are rich in fiber and nutrient dense.”⁶
- The [2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) recommend that total intake of red meat not exceed 1.8 oz a day.
- The [2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) recommend that teenage boys and men reduce their meat consumption. It also found that vegetarian and low meat Mediterranean diets are “associated with reduced risk of obesity, type 2 diabetes and some types of cancer.”
- The [2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) found that:
 - “About three-quarters of Americans meet or exceed the recommendation for meats, poultry, and eggs. However more than half do not meet the recommendation for nuts, seeds, and soy products,” and “beans, peas, and lentils are under consumed, yet provide important nutrients that support healthy dietary patterns.”

- “Common characteristics of dietary patterns associated with positive health outcomes include relatively higher intake of vegetables, fruits, legumes, whole grains, low- or non-fat dairy, lean meats and poultry seafood, nuts, and unsaturated vegetable oils, and relatively lower consumption of red and processed meats, sugar-sweetened foods and beverages, and refined grains.”
- “...dietary patterns characterized by higher intake of red and processed meats, sugar-sweetened foods and beverages, and refined grains are, in and of themselves, associated with detrimental health outcomes.”
- “Shifts are needed within the protein foods groups... Selecting from the seafood group or beans, peas, and lentils subgroup more often could help meet recommendations while still ensuring adequate protein consumption. Replacing processed or high-fat meats with beans, peas, and lentils would have similar benefits [help lower intake of saturated fat and sodium], as well as increasing dietary fiber, a dietary component of public health concern.”
- “Most intake of meats and poultry should be from fresh, frozen, or canned, and in lean forms (e.g., chicken breast or ground turkey) versus processed meats (e.g., hot dogs, sausages, ham, luncheon meats).”

References

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- 3 Simon, S. S. (2015). *World Health Organization Says Processed Meat Causes Cancer*. American Cancer Society. https://www.dartmouth.edu/wellness/docs/nov_inthenews_bb.pdf
- 4 American Heart Association, Inc. (n.d.). *How does Plant-Forward (Plant-Based) Eating Benefit your Health?*Www.Heart.Org. <https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-eating/eat-smart/nutrition-basics/how-does-plant-forward-eating-benefit-your-health>
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