Stack the Odds in Your Favor

The news media focuses a lot of attention on the health dangers of red and processed meats (see “Definitions” below), while some sources downplay the risks. It can be quite confusing! Our Registered Dietitian has reviewed the latest scientific research, and offers this clear-cut summary.

We also provide numerous suggestions for tasty, easy-to-prepare alternatives to red and processed meats.

Why gamble with your health? Read on to learn more about protein choices that can increase or decrease your chances of living a long, healthy life. When it comes to the foods you choose, make smart bets!

So what’s the beef with red and processed meats?

Doctors and dietitians have been saying to cut back on red and most processed meats for years. Typically, this recommendation was based on the amount of saturated fat and sodium in these foods. Current research suggests there’s more than just fat and salt linked with higher rates of chronic disease. In the June issue of Nutrition Action Health Letter, some of the suspects mentioned include saturated fat, nitrite, salt, and chemicals created when meat is cooked at high heat.

How much red meat is safe?

Researchers don’t know exactly what the safe amount of red and processed meats is. According to Walter Willett, chair of the department of nutrition at Harvard School of Public Health, eating these types of meats only once a week can eliminate most of the risk.

What should I eat instead of red and processed meats?

If hot dogs, hamburgers, sausage, bacon, and lunch meat are a mainstay in your meals you may be wondering what to eat. Here are some healthier alternatives.

**Poultry.** Chicken and turkey without the skin are good alternative to red and processed meats. Swapping red meat and processed meats for poultry may decrease your risk of stroke, even more so than fish.

Smart bets:
- Try a low-fat chicken or turkey burger rather than beef.
- Use low-fat chicken or turkey in chili.
- Swap out beef stew for chicken stew. For a twist on a new fall stew check out our Sweet & Savory Chicken Stew (see recipe on page 2).

Continued inside.

Definitions

**Red meat** is typically defined as beef, pork, and lamb.

**Processed meat** is typically defined as meat preserved by smoking, curing, or salting, or with the addition of chemical preservatives. For example: bacon, salami, sausage, hot dogs, processed or deli lunch meats.
Sweet & Savory Chicken Stew

- 2 tablespoons olive oil, divided
- 1 pound skinless chicken breast tenders, cut into bite-size pieces
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 4 medium parsnips, peeled and chopped
- 2 medium carrots, peeled and chopped
- 2 teaspoons fresh rosemary, or ½ teaspoon dried
- 1 teaspoon fresh sage or ¼ teaspoon dried
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon fresh ground pepper
- 4 cups reduced-sodium chicken broth
- 2 Granny Smith apples, peeled and chopped
- 2 teaspoons cider vinegar
- 1 cup canned white beans (such as Great Northern), drained and rinsed well
- 1 cup pre-cooked long grain brown rice

Instructions:
1) Heat 1 tablespoon of oil at medium heat in a large pot or Dutch oven. Add the chicken pieces, stirring occasionally until just cooked about 3-5 minutes. Remove chicken and set aside.
2) Add the remaining tablespoon of oil to pot and add onion, parsnips, carrots, rosemary, sage, salt and pepper. Cook, stirring often, until the vegetables begin to tender (3-5 minutes).
3) Add in the broth and apples and bring to a simmer over high heat. Reduce the heat, maintaining a simmer not a boil. Cook for about 8-10 minutes until vegetables are tender. Add the chicken, white beans, brown rice, and apple cider vinegar to the pot and stir well.

Makes 6, 1 ½ cup servings.
Adapted from Eating Well – Autumn Chicken Stew

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- Cook a chicken or turkey breast and slice it for sandwiches and salads.

Fish. Experts agree that eating fish has heart health benefits—especially fatty fish like salmon and mackerel. You can safely eat three meals with four-ounces of a variety of fish each week. To reduce risk of environmental pollutants, eat a variety of seafood and limit intake of large predatory fish like shark, swordfish, king mackerel, and tile fish.

Smart bets:
- Have grilled salmon in place of steak.
- Try fish tacos in place of beef.
- Bake a low-fat white fish like cod, in place of a roast.

Low-fat dairy. Low-fat or fat-free milk, yogurt, and cottage cheese are good protein sources. Replacing red and processed meats with low-fat dairy may reduce your risk of stroke.

Smart bets:
- Rather than ham on a salad, have a veggie salad with cottage cheese on the side.
- Replace your bacon and eggs breakfast with a serving of nonfat Greek yogurt sprinkled with granola and fresh fruit.

Nuts. Nuts and seeds are a source of plant-based protein. Swapping a serving of red or processed meats for nuts or nut butter may cut risk of stroke. Replacing high-fat and sugary sweets with about a half cup of nuts each day without increasing calories may reduce cholesterol levels. But it's a balancing act. It's easy to eat more than you think which can lead to weight gain, negating any cholesterol lowering benefits. A half-cup of almonds has about 400 calories (nearly a third of daily needs for most folks).

Smart bets:
- Replace a ham sandwich with a peanut butter sandwich with banana on whole grain bread.
- Sprinkle a salad with chopped nuts rather than bacon bits

Tofu/Soy/Beans: Another source of plant-based protein, beans have several health benefits, including lowering cholesterol. For variety and balance, try having a vegetarian meal that includes some tofu or beans several times a week.

Smart bets:
- Try a stir fry with tofu rather than beef.
- Try a bean burrito in place of a beef burrito.
- Try replacing beef in tacos with beans.

Based on the odds, it's a good bet that eating less red and processed meat and choosing poultry, fish, and vegetable proteins more often is likely to score you an advantage. The odds are significant enough to be worthy of some changes to your food choices.
What’s my target A1C?

Ever wonder why your doctor checks your A1C twice a year? What is the meaning behind that number? The A1C is your average glucose (blood sugar) over two to three months. When your glucose is not controlled, higher amounts of glucose attach to the hemoglobin (a protein in red blood cells), which damages the inside of your blood vessels. Some of these damages can occur in your eyes, kidneys, and feet. The A1C test lets you and your doctor know how well controlled your diabetes has been. Here are some questions to ask your doctor about:

- What is my target A1C?
- How often should I have my A1C tested?
- What is my target blood sugar range?

Here is a good visual of what your A1C number means:

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Success Corner

One of our amazing members, Judy, started working with a Condition Support Health Coach last September to improve physical fitness and lose some weight. In conversations with her coach, Judy discussed why these goals are important to her. She is looking forward to an active retirement of hiking, fishing, and traveling in the RV with her husband -- not sitting in a rocking chair. She states, “I have to have my health in order to do those things.”

Although Judy has had a few setbacks over the past year, she has managed to stay focused on her long-term goals. Admittedly, a difficult part of reaching these goals was that fact that she doesn’t particularly enjoy exercise! When asked what kept her going when it got tough, she mentioned that she has several books that she turns to that remind her why a healthy lifestyle is important. She also looks for stories of other people who have been successful but also faced challenges, saying, “It pulls me back into reality.”

While one tool is to find ways to remind herself of the importance of good health, another is learning a new way of thinking about setbacks. Rather than focusing on a bad day, Judy now looks forward to tomorrow, asking herself, “What’s tomorrow going to be like?” This motivates her to be more diligent about measuring her portion sizes and use more accuracy with her daily food journal. “Calories add up quickly, and food sizes grow on you,” she says.

As for working with a Condition Support health coach, Judy states, “I love the program. I have to be accountable to someone and have a chance to discuss issues.”

“I love the program. I have to be accountable to someone and have a chance to discuss issues.”

– Judy, program participant

And the reward for keeping her eyes on the prize? So far, Judy has lost over 30 pounds and is looking forward to a rocking-chair-free retirement.

Thinking of getting a flu shot?

Now is the time!

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), flu season can begin as early as October and last well into May. Flu activity usually peaks in January, February, or later.

While the CDC recommends everyone over six months of age have a seasonal flu vaccination, it’s especially important for people with COPD, asthma, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes.

Note that it takes about two weeks after vaccination for antibodies to develop in the body and provide protection against the flu.

For more information, visit CDC.gov/flu.

Flu benefit information is available at PacificSource.com/flu.
Would you like to talk with a Condition Support Nurse or Dietitian?

A nurse or dietitian can work closely with you to offer support, resources, and encouragement as you work to successfully manage your condition. You’re welcome to call us toll-free at (888) 987-5805 or email yoursupport@pacificsource.com.