CANCER PREVENTION
LIMITING RED AND PROCESSED MEATS IN THE DIET

Motivational Tip
Establishing a healthy lifestyle and eating pattern can help reduce your risk for chronic disease. Vary your protein foods as part of a healthy eating pattern by choosing seafood, eggs, beans, peas, lentils, nuts, seeds, soy, and lean meats and poultry.

You may have heard that eating red and processed meats can increase your risk for cancer. In this fact sheet, we will briefly review what the research—including the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020–2025 (DGA; U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA] and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS] 2020), says—and provide resources for you to learn more about the topic.

What is cancer?
The American Cancer Society (2020) says, “Cancer can start any place in the body. It starts when cells grow out of control and crowd out normal cells. This makes it hard for the body to work the way it should.”

What are processed meats?
According to the World Cancer Research Fund International (WCRF n.d.), processed meats are meats made from beef, pork, and poultry that have been preserved by curing, salting, smoking, drying, canning, or fermenting. Examples of common processed meats include:

- Bacon
- Hot dogs
- Lunch meat
- Corned beef
- Canned meat
- Sausage
- Pepperoni
- Salami
- Jerky
- Ham

Why is it important to choose a variety of protein foods?
Seafood; eggs; beans, peas, and lentils; nuts, seeds, and soy (such as tofu and tempeh); and lean meat and poultry are all good sources of protein that can be included as part of a healthy dietary pattern to lower your risk of colorectal cancer.

What is red meat?
Red meat is minimally processed cuts of meat from animals, such as beef, veal, pork, deer, lamb, mutton, horse, and goat (WCRF n.d.). It’s a complete protein and provides iron, zinc, and some B vitamins. Complete proteins are those with all the essential amino acids (building blocks of protein) in adequate amounts. While red meat is a good protein source in our diets, most intake should be in lean forms.

What does the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020–2025, tell us about eating protein foods?
The DGA (USDA and HHS 2020) states that replacing high-fat red meat and processed meats has been identified as a characteristic of a healthy eating pattern and reduces the risk of colorectal cancer. Processed meats are also high in fat and sodium, which can raise the risk for other chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes, in addition to cancer. Replace high-fat red and processed meats with lean meats and poultry, eggs, seafood, beans, peas, lentils, nuts, seeds, and soy products. The guidelines recommend the amount of protein foods in ounce-equivalents to be consumed daily. For example, the daily amount for adults is 5 to 7 ounce-equivalents, based on their age, gender, and physical activity level. Speak with your health care provider or a registered dietician or access MyPlate.gov to learn what is recommended for you.
Shopping Tips
• Choose fresh.
• Look for lean meats and poultry, eggs, and seafood.
• Look for beans, peas, lentils, nuts, seeds, and soy products.

Examine Your Choices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>What I Buy</th>
<th>What I Plan to Buy/Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example: Protein foods</td>
<td>Meat, poultry, eggs, seafood, beans, peas, lentils, nuts, seeds, and soy</td>
<td>High-fat red meat (prime rib, ribeye, 80/20% ground beef, bacon) and chicken with the skin on</td>
<td>Lean meats and poultry, eggs, seafood, beans, peas, lentils, nuts, seeds, tofu, and soy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My Goal (what change will you make?): ____________________________________________

What is 1 ounce-equivalent protein foods?
• 1 ounce lean meats, poultry, or seafood
• 1 egg
• ¼ cup cooked beans, peas, lentils, or tofu
• 1 tablespoon nut or seed butter
• ½ ounce nuts or seeds

Eat a variety of the above protein foods daily as part of a healthy diet.

Why have you been hearing about meat and cancer in the news?
In 2015 the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC; the cancer agency of the World Health Organization [WHO]) reviewed existing research and showed a link between cancer deaths and eating processed meats. Eating approximately 2 ounces (50 grams, equal to six strips of bacon or one hot dog) of processed meat each day raises a person's risk of getting colorectal cancer by 18 percent (Simon 2018). The IARC reported that eating roughly 2 ounces of processed meat per day can be connected to 34,000 deaths per year. While the IARC did not find that the consumption of red meat causes cancer, it did find a possible relation between consuming a lot (more than 12 to 18 ounces in cooked weight per week) of red meat and colon cancer. More research is needed in this area.

What does this mean for Pennsylvanians?
According to the Pennsylvania Department of Health Cancer Statistics Dashboard (n.d.), in 2018 there were 6,325 new cases of colorectal cancer in Pennsylvania. That means that for every 100,000 people, 37 colorectal cancer cases were reported. Approximately one out of every 24 Pennsylvanians will develop colorectal cancer in their lifetime. There are many causes of colorectal cancer, but one way to decrease your risk is to limit your consumption of high-fat red and processed meats. If you eat lean meat and poultry, have a portion size of 2 to 3 ounces or less. Enjoy nutrient-dense foods—vegetables and fruits; whole grains; seafood and eggs; beans, peas, and lentils; unsalted nuts and seeds; fat-free and low-fat dairy products; and lean meats and poultry—prepared with no or little added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium. Other ways to reduce your risk of cancer are to get regular physical activity, avoid tobacco, and limit how much alcohol you drink.

Resources
See the websites below for more information.
Penn State Cancer Institute Colorectal Cancer Information https://www.pennstatehealth.org/services-treatments/colorectal-cancer

References

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