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Put down the bacon! Report emphasizes cancer-fat links

By Nanci Hellmich, USA TODAY

There is more evidence than ever that a person who weighs too much is more likely to develop cancer, a landmark report said Wednesday.

And forget eating bacon, sausage and lunchmeat. No amount is considered completely safe, according to the analysis from the American Institute for Cancer Research and the World Cancer Research Fund.

An international panel of experts reviewed more than 7,000 large-scale studies and spent five years developing the report (www.dietandcancerreport.org).

Excess body fat increases the risk of cancer of the colon, kidney, pancreas, esophagus and uterus as well as postmenopausal breast cancer, the report says.

READ THE REPORT: [No amount of processed meat considered completely safe](#)

"This was a much larger impact than even the researchers expected," says Karen Collins, a cancer institute nutrition adviser. "People forget body fat is not an inert glob that we are carrying around on the waistline and thighs. It's a metabolically active tissue that produces substances in the body that promote the development of cancer."

Michael Thun, head of epidemiological research for the American Cancer Society, says, "People are not paying nearly enough attention to the relationship between obesity and increased cancer risk." The report also found:

- Every 1.7 ounces of processed meat consumed a day increases the risk of colorectal cancer by 21%.

"This is a wake-up call for people who eat hot dogs or pepperoni pizza regularly," Collins says. "They need to be looking for other alternatives. But you can still occasionally have a hot dog."

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There could be several reasons why processed meats may increase cancer risk. Carcinogens have been linked to smoked meat and the nitrates and excess salt in processed meats, Collins says.

- The evidence linking red meat intake (beef, pork and lamb) to colorectal cancer is more convincing than it was a decade ago, the report says. It advises limiting red meat to 18 ounces of cooked meat a week. The cancer risk is minimal for people who eat that amount, but beyond that the risk increases, Collins says.

- Alcohol consumption is linked to an increased risk of cancer of the mouth, throat, larynx, esophagus, breast, colon and liver.

The report is drawing fire from the food industry.

Ceci Snyder, a registered dietitian with the National Pork Board, which represents pork producers, says, "The U.S. Dietary Guidelines include meat and processed meat, and those guidelines are based on a review of the scientific evidence."

Mary Young of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association says the group engaged scientists to review the scientific literature on the topic, and they concluded there is no evidence red meat causes cancer.

A separate survey of 1,022 adults, also released Wednesday by the cancer institute, showed that 39% say cancer is their top health concern and 49% say it's highly unlikely they can do anything to prevent cancer. "Let's not be afraid anymore," Collins says. "There is something you can do about it."

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