Experts Warn Red and Processed Meat Still Pose Cancer Risk

Cancer experts agree that eating too much red meat and processed meat does increase our risk of colorectal cancer, and that some people are already eating above the recommended amount.

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Top health organizations and global cancer experts are urging the public to continue following the recommendation to limit red meat intake to three portions a week and eat little, if any, processed meat for cancer prevention.

This statement comes after a consortium, known as NutriRECs, claimed that most people do not need to reduce or moderate how much red and processed meat they eat. However, top health organisations as well as global research experts in the field have looked at the analysis from NutriRECs and disagree with their interpretation of the scientific evidence.

The NutriRECs research results are not significantly different from what World Cancer Research Fund/American Institute for Cancer Research's 2018 report found, and indeed seem to verify WCRF/AICR's findings. However, the NutriRECs researchers have made what is a confusing interpretation of the results which has let to this unnecessary recommendation to the public. By looking at the average amount of red and processed meat that people eat in the US and Europe, they have decided that there is no need to recommend for most people to reduce or moderate the amount they eat.

Furthermore, the NutriRECs recommendation does not separate out red and processed meat and this suggests that three or four portions of processed meat a week do not affect cancer risk significantly enough to warrant a reduction in the amount people eat; this conclusion from NutriRecs is not supported by the scientific evidence. The best available evidence supports an increased cancer risk.

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Nigel Brockton, PhD, vice president of research at AICR, said: "We stand by the rigor of our research methodology and our Cancer Prevention Recommendation that people should limit red meat intake to less than 12oz to 18oz per week and avoid processed meat. The underlying results reported by the NutriRECs group are actually consistent with this advice but they dismiss these

results based on the limitations of some contributing research methods. We believe this is not in the best public interest. Regularly eating processed meat, and higher consumption of red meat, increases your risk of colorectal cancer; suggesting that there is no need to limit these foods would put people at risk of colorectal cancer and further undermine public confidence in dietary advice."

It's important for people to remember that limiting how much red and processed meat we eat is only one part of lowering cancer risk. To most effectively reduce our overall risk, we should follow a healthy pattern of living. This includes not smoking, limiting alcohol intake, being a healthy weight, eating a healthy diet and staying physically active.

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