Should Hospitals Ban Bacon to Reduce Cancer Risk?

More than 80% of patients agree with health experts that bacon, deli meats and sausages ought to be eliminated from hospital menus.

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From hot dogs to bacon and sausages, most Americans enjoy processed meat. But these meats are known to significantly increase colorectal cancer risk and have been linked to pancreatic, stomach and breast cancer, among other health problems.

Now, a new survey has found that a majority of hospital patients support removing processed meats from hospital menus in an effort to decrease cancer risk, according to the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, a nonprofit organization dedicated to saving and improving human and animal lives through plant-based diets and research. Survey results were published in the Journal of Management and Health Policy.

Researchers surveyed 209 patients, 18 years and older, at two hospitals in Washington, DC—one in a low-income area; the other, in a high-income area. Participants were asked to rate the importance of having Wi-Fi access, a private room, pictures on the wall and bacon or sausage as menu options during a hospital stay.

Patients were then read information that said health authorities found bacon and sausage cause colon cancer and asked whether they would agree with a hospital policy banning processed meats to help reduce cancer risk.

About 83% of patients were strongly in favor of hospitals eliminating processed meat in order to reduce cancer risk. An estimated 69% said they didn't feel it was important for hospitals to have bacon or sausage on the menu. Even among those who felt it was important or extremely important to be able to eat bacon or sausage, 59% either agreed, strongly agreed or were neutral regarding a hospital ban. There were no significant differences in responses in low- versus high-income areas.

"It's not uncommon for patients to wake up from surgery to be greeted with bacon and sausage—the very foods that may have contributed to their health problems in the first place," said Neal Barnard, MD, study author and president of the Physicians Committee. "It's time to create a healthier food environment."

While health experts have called on hospitals to remove these meats from their menus, Barnard says, it’s now clear that patients also agree and want to see more healthy food on their hospital trays.

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