

Is anything safe to eat? Cancer report adds bacon, ham and drink to danger list

By JENNY HOPE

Last updated at 16:26 01 November 2007

- [Comments \(0\)](#)
- [Share](#)



Red meat and alcohol can give you cancer, says study



Fat watch: A woman tucks into a juicy beef steak

A bombshell report yesterday blamed putting on weight, alcohol and a whole range of everyday foods for causing cancer.

Consumers were told to curb drinking, avoid processed meats - including bacon, ham and sausages - and cut their intake of red meat and salt.

Even supposedly healthy fruit and vegetables were said to offer only "limited" protection against the disease.

Last night, as the public wondered what exactly is safe to eat, there was a growing medical and food industry backlash against the £4.5 million study by 21 international experts on behalf of the World Cancer Research Fund.

Britain's top cancer specialist, Professor-Karol Sikora, called the advice "too trite and too dogmatic" and warned "no one will do it".

He added: "Alcohol, red meat and bacon in moderation will do us no harm and to suggest they will is wrong.

"I don't intend to give up my Sunday roast and glass of wine."

The report offers the toughest advice yet on guarding against cancer.

Its key finding is that being fat is as bad for you as smoking.

Read more...

- ['Fit towns': Latest government plan to tackle Britain's rising obesity](#)

Excess body fat can trigger at least six common cancers including those affecting the breast, bowel and pancreas.

The study found strong evidence that red meat and processed meats can cause bowel cancer while there are strong links between alcohol and mouth, oesophagus and breast cancers.

The experts say there is no safe level of drinking.

People who take small amounts of alcohol to protect against heart disease should limit themselves to two drinks a day for men and one for women.

The report's guidelines include staying as lean as possible and eating no processed meats and only 500g of cooked red meat a week - about three 6oz steaks.

WHAT THE DOCTORS RECOMMEND				
FOOD	DAILY RECOMMENDED ALLOWANCE	PROS	CONS	CANCER RISK/PREVENTION
Red meat (beef, pork, lamb)	100g (raw meat), 71g (cooked weight)	Valuable source of nutrients, protein and energy. Studies have shown it can protect against heart disease	Can damage the lining of the colon	Increased risk of bowel cancer
Processed meat (salami, ham, bacon, hot dogs)	Avoid	Source of energy	Preparation by smoking, curing or salting can add cancer causing substances	Increased risk of bowel cancer
Fruit and vegetables (not potatoes, yam, cassava, sweet potatoes)	Five portions a day	High in nutrients that strengthen the immune system. Boosts the compounds in the body which protect cells from damage that cause cancer	The level of protection offered from cancer has been called into question	Reduces risk of cancers of the mouth, pharynx, larynx, oesophagus, stomach, lung, pancreas and prostate
Salt (foods rich in salt include pizza, bread, ready meals)	No more than 6g	Essential as part of a balanced diet. Adds flavour to food	Damages the lining of the stomach, can raise blood pressure increasing the risk of stroke and heart disease	Increased risk of stomach cancer
Sugary drinks (cola, lemonade, cordials)	Avoid	Source of energy	Weight gain and an increased risk of obesity	Increased risk of bowel cancer and breast cancer
Alcohol	Men: 1 pint of beer/lager or 50ml of spirits or two 125ml glasses of wine. Women: Half pint of beer/lager or 25ml of spirits or one 125ml glass of wine.	Some studies suggest small quantities can protect from heart disease	Damages DNA, causes weight gain and offers little nutritional benefit	Increased risk of cancer of the mouth, pharynx, larynx, oesophagus, breast, liver and bowel cancer
Garlic	No recommendation	Powerful antioxidant. Studies have shown it can protect the heart	Bad breath	Reduces risk of bowel cancer
Dietary supplements to protect against cancer 	Avoid	Beneficial for pregnant women, young children, the elderly and those who have vitamin deficiencies	Upsets the balance of the nutrients in the body, risk of side effects	High doses can upset nutrient balance in body, increasing the risk of cancer
Fast foods (burgers, fried chicken, chips, crisps, chocolate)	Avoid	Source of energy	Weight gain and an increased risk of obesity	Increases risk of bowel and breast cancer
Fruit juice	One 150ml glass a day	Strengthens immune system, a good source of vitamins and minerals	Contains high levels of sugar and can cause weight gain	Reduces the risk of cancers of the mouth, pharynx, larynx, oesophagus, stomach, lung, pancreas and prostate
Dietary fibre (oats, wholegrain cereal, brown rice)	No recommendation	Speeds up digestive system. Is filling so it can help avoid weight gain	Can cause weight gain	Reduces risk of bowel cancer
Milk	No recommendation	Source of calcium which strengthens bones	Weight gain possible	Reduces the risk of bowel cancer, increases risk of prostate cancer

Click to enlarge

To reach their verdict, the panel sifted through 7,000 of the best studies on cancer, diet and exercise produced over the last 40 years.

Professor Martin Wiseman, the project director, said it was a "milestone" that would help people through a maze of conflicting health messages.

He said: "When individual studies are published, it is impossible for the public to put them into context and know how seriously they should be taking the findings. This report does this job for them.

"If people follow our recommendations, they can be confident they are following the best advice possible based on all the scientific research."

Scroll down for more...

CUT FAT AND KEEP FIT

KEEPING weight down and exercise levels up can cut cancer risk.

At present clinical obesity is defined as having a Body Mass Index of 30 or above. BMI is calculated by dividing a person's weight in kilograms by height in metres squared.

A BMI rating of 25 to 29.9 is classified as 'overweight' while below that is considered healthy. The report says everyone should aim for a BMI of 18.5 to 24.9 – but the lower the better.

Being obese is also linked to heart disease and type 2 diabetes.

The report also says people can use waistline circumference as a check.

Men with a 37in waist and over and women with 31.5in are said to be at risk.

Being physically active lowers cancer risk, says the report, and everyone should be moderately active for 30 minutes a day. This includes walking briskly and doing housework.

As fitness improves, people should aim for 60 minutes of moderate activity a day or 30 minutes of vigorous activity, such as jogging.

Studies show regular activity can help keep hormone levels healthy – high levels can increase cancer risk – strengthen the immune system, keep the digestive system healthy and keep weight down.

But Professor Sikora, medical director of CancerPartnersUK, said: "Cancer can't be reduced to a simple formula. It takes a great deal of eating the wrong foods to significantly raise cancer risk.

"This gives the impression that if you don't eat a sausage, you won't get cancer."

Richard Lowe, chief executive of the Meat and Livestock Commission, said: "We were surprised by the extremely draconian recommendation not to eat processed meats. Ham and bacon are two of the most popular meat products in Britain.

"The Food Standards Agency recommends red meat, including processed meats, as part of a healthy balanced diet."

He pointed out that the report linked obesity with six cancers, alcohol with five and meat with just one.

Scroll down for more...

DOUBTS ON FIVE A DAY

MANY believe five portions of fruit and veg a day will help keep cancer away.

But the study suggests they may not be as protective as thought. And there's no such thing as a 'super-food' either.

Experts who once believed eating lots of fruit and veg prevented cancer have downgraded their advice.

Non-starchy veg including green leafy varieties, spinach, broccoli and aubergine, 'probably' protect against cancers of the mouth, larynx, pharynx, oesophagus and stomach.

Fruits may protect against mouth, pharynx, larynx, oesophagus, lung and stomach cancers. Dietary fibre,

found in cereals, roots, tubers, vegetables, fruits and pulses, probably helps prevent bowel cancer.

There was 'insubstantial' evidence on the effect of poultry, fish and eggs on cancer risk.

However, fish and foods containing vitamin D were found to provide 'limited' protection against bowel cancer.

Professor Martin Wiseman, project director of the report, said publicity surrounding individual fruit and veg - known as superfoods - was wide of the mark.

Although they contained cancer-fighting ingredients 'there is no evidence they act like a magic bullet'.

Mark Hastings, of the British Beer and Pub Association, said the experts did not know they decided even small amounts of alcohol put people at risk.

He said: "There's a risk attached to everything in life, from stepping outside the front door to driving a car. I don't think this report should deter people from having a social drink."

The report says the evidence linking obesity and cancer is much stronger than ten years ago, when the WCRF first investigated it.

Diet and obesity account for at least a third of cancers - as many as smoking.

And while smoking is declining in Britain, obesity levels are rising.

The report provides target figures for Body Mass Index that will keep cancer at bay.

The experts say there is no definitive evidence that fatter people who lose weight will cut their cancer risk, but it is a "sensible judgment".

A decade ago obesity was implicated only with cancer of the womb lining. Now, says the panel, there is "convincing" evidence that excess body fat can cause six different cancers.

They found a specific strong link between fat around the abdomen and bowel cancer.

There is also a "probable" connection between body fat and gall bladder cancer, and between abdominal fat and pancreatic, post-menopausal breast and endometrial cancers.

The report describes possible ways in which body fat fuels cancer, including promotion of the growth hormones and oestrogen, which can increase the risk of breast cancer.

Alcohol may trigger DNA damage leading to cancer.

Professor Sir Michael Marmot of University College London, who chaired the panel, said: "We are recommending that people aim to be as lean as possible within the healthy range."

Scroll down for more...

THE GROWING DANGER

BEING tall puts you at a bigger risk of various cancers, says the report.

In the last ten years there has been more research showing that greater height is related to cancer, especially for bowel and post-menopausal breast cancers.

The risk of developing either disease increased by 9 per cent for every extra two inches in height.

There is also a link with pancreatic cancer, pre-menopausal breast cancer and ovarian cancer.

There is no cut-off point – it's a sliding scale where the taller you are, the greater the risk.

But the reverse is true for heart disease, so the jury is still out on whether being tall is a good or bad thing for overall health. Tallness is

unlikely to actually trigger a cancerous process, but is a sign of other factors raising the risk.

These are genetic, environmental, hormonal and nutritional factors affecting growth in the womb through to early adulthood.

For women, unusually high birthweight was found to be a probable cause of post-menopausal breast cancer.

But small size at birth is known to predict an increased risk of chronic illnesses such as heart disease and type 2 diabetes later in life.

The reasons why high birthweight should be linked to breast cancer are unclear. As with height, it was likely to act as a marker for other factors having a direct influence.

"This might sound difficult, but this is what the science is telling us more clearly than ever. Putting on weight can increase your cancer risk, even if you are still within the healthy range."

Fast foods high in fat, sugar and calories should be avoided, along with fizzy and sugary drinks.

People should drink only one glass of fruit juice a day.

There were mixed messages about dairy products.

Milk was thought to protect against bowel cancer and possibly bladder cancer-but high-calcium diets may be a cause of prostate cancer.

Breastfeeding, in contrast, protects mothers against breast cancer and children against adult obesity.

The report says exercise lowers cancer risk.

People should aim for an hour of moderate activity a day or 30 minutes of vigorous activity.

Professor Mike Richards, the Government's cancer czar, called the report "the most authoritative and exhaustive review thus far".

Dr Lesley Walker, Cancer Research UK's director of cancer information, said it reinforced the need for action on obesity.

She said: "We have been disappointed with the Government's response. Money has been diverted from delivering earlier commitments and there has been a lack of coordination across departments".

Pamela Goldberg of Breast Cancer Campaign said: "A recent survey showed that fewer than 10 per cent of women knew that a diet high in saturated fat and high alcohol consumption increased the chances of breast cancer."

The Food and Drink Federation said the industry was "leading the world" in reformulating products to

have less fat, sugar and salt.

It said: "The report is a timely reminder that Government, and others, need to do much more - particularly in encouraging citizens to get active."

PLANS FOR 'HEALTHY TOWNS' TO TACKLE OBESITY CRISIS

The health secretary, Alan Johnson, is to call on planners to create 'healthy towns' in a bid to tackle the obesity crisis.

Mr Johnson says government plans to create 10 eco-towns should be altered to include new practical measures in a bid to encourage healthier practices, such as walking to school.

An initiative in 10 French towns which focused on young children has seen obesity rates in boys aged seven to 12 drop by almost half, while in girls of the same age it fell by almost a third.

Mr Johnson is calling for a wide-ranging approach across all Government departments in order to improve public health by changing the layout and design of towns.

Among the measures being considered are regular weigh-ins for children, increasing the number of cycle lanes, and creating safe walking routes to schools. Other ideas include creating GP practices in the High Street for easier access and improved leisure facilities, parks and playgrounds

Mr Johnson said: "Whilst people have to take responsibility for their own exercise and diet, as part of our drive to tackle obesity we are also looking at ways of improving the built environment, doing more to help people make physical activity a normal part of everyday life.

"International evidence and research shows that we need a large scale approach across the whole community to help tackle obesity.

"As part of our commitment to provide new eco-towns we are also considering making them healthy towns - through their layout, facilities and construction. If this works it could also apply to areas undergoing housing growth and renewal."

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-490845/Is-safe-eat-Cancer-report-adds-bacon-ham-drink-danger-list.html#ixzz2BpxH5o1F>

Follow us: [@MailOnline on Twitter](#) | [DailyMail on Facebook](#)