

# MAD ABOUT MEAT

## The Truth about Why Meat Consumption is Essential for Optimal Health

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When it comes to diet and nutrition it seems that everyone is mad about meat these days for one reason or another. Red meat became the red-headed stepchild in the American diet due to its association with saturated fat after early animal and human studies (1950-60's) established a positive correlation between saturated fat intake and heart disease risk factors. This led to a nationwide fat scare that became the basis of the dietary recommendations in the U.S. over the past 50 years. This combined with the growth of animal activist groups working to turn Americans to a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle has caused additional fear and confusion for U.S. consumers.

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In the midst of focusing on reducing American's fat intakes the food economy was also evolving. More meals were being eaten away from home; especially as the fast food industry took hold. Growth in the convenient food products market combined with enlarged portions quickly became the consumers' pacifier to alleviate their guilt about eating too much meat while soothing their sweet tooth with all the added sugar that took the place of the fat.

Now after years of being on fat alert, evidence has accumulated that contradicts the past 50 years of this dietary scare. A meta-analysis of 21 prospective epidemiologic studies published by Siri-Tarino et al (2009) showed there is no significant evidence for concluding that dietary saturated fat is associated with an increased risk of coronary heart disease or cardiovascular disease.

So what about diabetes and obesity? Some health experts have worked to associate red meat intake with these health disparities leading consumers to eat more carbohydrates and less protein. This is the opposite of what a diabetic patient should do since consuming carbohydrates increases blood glucose and insulin no longer does its job managing the glucose in the body. Furthermore, when more carbohydrates are consumed than necessary the excess is stored as fat leading to overweight or obesity. Finally, both diabetes and obesity increase the risk for heart disease. Feinman et al (2014) published a critical review of the evidence explaining why Dietary Carbohydrate restriction is the best first approach in diabetes management and how it is also the best option for weight management and is beneficial in lowering the risk factors for heart disease.

Despite the scientific evidence it is just as compelling to look at this situation from a more common-sense approach. Consider that total calories consumed per day by Americans drastically increased by 617 Kcals per day from 1970 to 2008 according to the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Advisory Committee Report. So Americans have been eating more which is a logical path to increased obesity, diabetes and heart disease. More compelling is the fact that the source of these extra calories is primarily due to significant increased consumption of refined carbohydrate foods. While total meat consumption has slightly increased per capita red meat consumption has substantially decreased over the past 2-3 decades. So, if we consider what Americans are eating it is simply not logical to blame meat for these health disparities. Instead the profound increase in refined carbohydrates seem to be the more likely culprit in this situation.

But the point of this article is not to point fingers but to bring some sense to this matter. Red meat is not the cause of these epidemic health disparities. Instead red meat is a nutrient rich power house that is essential in bringing our nation back to health. Let's consider how the human race survived before there was knowledge of essential nutrients

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or synthetic nutrient supplementation. It is hard to imagine life without this knowledge which we have only learned in the past 100 years. But our ancestors survived for thousands of years before any of this was known. How did they survive without understanding the things we do today? Well there were definitely more nutrient deficiencies but it seems in all historic accounts a population without meat was less likely to thrive or survive. Paleontologists point to meat consumption as the factor that

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allowed the human brain to grow and evolve which led to more innovation and civilization. Even today in the 21st century we can see the obvious benefits and necessity of meat in the diet in developing countries. Countless studies have shown how supplementing red meat in the diet of children in these countries not only increases growth but reverses nutrient deficiencies and allows for cognitive development. This positive outcome is due to essential nutrients such as Zinc and Iron.

It seems simple to understand that meat is an essential component of a healthy diet. It is a good or excellent source of multiple essential nutrients such as Protein, B-vitamins, Iron, Zinc and Choline. While many health professionals have recommended to decrease meat consumption over the years due to its association with saturated fat the fat composition of meat has been misunderstood and consumers have been misled. Take beef for instance, according to the USDA Nutrient Database for Standard Reference it is well documented that over 50% of beef's fat is in the form of monounsaturated fats, "heart healthy fats". Actually, beef is the number one source for monounsaturated fat in the American diet. Furthermore, one third of the saturated fat is in the form of stearic acid which has been found to have no effect on blood cholesterol levels. In addition to a very favorable fat profile beef and pork both have become 40% leaner over the past four decades. This was accomplished through improved management practices along with more closely trimming fat on the retail cuts.

So anti meat activist are mad about meat because it is really quite impossible to create a valid reason why a person should restrict meat in their diet yet they continue to work to endanger the health and freedom of choice of consumers by pushing for things like Meatless Monday. Meat eaters are equally mad about meat as they have been made feel guilty for eating this nutrient rich food over the years and led to poorer health by filling the void with refined carbohydrates and hidden sugars.

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Protein is the most satiating nutrient and is essential for building and maintaining muscle mass which naturally begins declining around age 40. Animal protein sources are the best source of protein for muscle synthesis as they are complete, containing all nine essential amino acids. Vegans who choose to only eat plant based protein have to assure to get the correct combination of foods to create a complete amino acid package in a single moment in order to stimulate muscle synthesis. This is very difficult to accomplish. The timing of protein intake and the amount is also critical to muscle maintenance and synthesis. Therefore, missing just a single day or even a meal of high quality protein for an elderly person can lead to greater muscle degradation and lower overall health. On the flip side as we age if we maintain the optimal level of high quality protein in our diets then overall health status will be improved and independence can be maintained for much longer due to adequate muscle and bone strength.

The bottom line is that we need real food including meat in our diet every day to achieve the sustainable health we are looking for. Moderate protein diets have been found to be effective in weight loss, lowering blood pressure, improving blood lipid profiles, managing diabetes, and reducing age related sarcopenia. So STOP the MADNESS, the truth is that meat consumption is essential in achieving optimal health and living a longer, happier life.



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