

The Worst Meat for Your Heart Is...

Not red meat. It's processed meat. Harvard University researchers have concluded that eating processed meat--that is, any meat that is preserved by smoking, curing or salting or has chemical preservatives added to it--not only increases your risk for heart disease, but also type 2 diabetes. Processed meats include hot dogs, bacon, sausage, salami, pepperoni and deli meats.

How much can you safely eat?

Just one serving a week, according to lead study author Renata Micha, a research fellow at the Harvard School of Public Health. "Based on our findings, eating up to one serving per week would be associated with relatively small risk," she said.

The study:

Health Day News reports that the Harvard team analyzed data from 20 studies that included more than 1.2 million participants. Among them, 23,889 had coronary heart disease, 2,280 had had a stroke and 10,797 had diabetes.

The results:

While eating unprocessed red meat, such as beef, hamburger, lamb and pork, did not significantly increase the chances of developing heart disease or diabetes, eating processed meat definitely increased the risk. Specifically, the risk for heart disease jumped 42 percent and the risk for diabetes increased 19 percent. "When we looked at average nutrients in unprocessed meats and processed meats eaten in the U.S., we found that they contained similar amounts of saturated fat and cholesterol," Micha told HealthDay News. "In contrast, processed meats contained, on average, four times higher amounts of sodium and two times higher amounts of nitrate preservatives." That means it is the salt and other preservatives, rather than fats, that explain the higher risk for heart attacks and diabetes seen with processed meats. The study findings were presented to the American Heart Association conference on cardiovascular disease in San Francisco.