

Avoiding Gout

Have you ever seen a painting of a nobleman with his bandaged foot propped up on a footstool? Chances are that he was suffering from gout, a common, painful form of arthritis. Gout is still a problem today and most commonly occurs among men over age 40. Close to 3 million American men have gout. Where genetics can certainly play a role in determining one's risk for gout, other more controllable factors are also important.

A recent study examined close to 29,000 healthy, physically active male runners to see which factors affected their risk of having gout. One factor that was identified was meat consumption; even among this relatively healthy group, men eating the most meat had the highest risk of developing gout. Other factors that increased risk of gout included higher alcohol intake, lower fruit intake, being overweight or obese, and being less physically active. It looks like reducing risk of gout is another reason for becoming vegetarian.

Williams PT. 2008. Effects of diet, physical activity and performance, and body weight on incident gout in ostensibly healthy, vigorously active men. *Am J Clin Nutr* 87:1480-87.

Association Found Between Cured Meat and Increased Risk of COPD

COPD is the abbreviation for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, a condition that makes it hard to breathe. Both chronic bronchitis and emphysema are types of COPD, the fourth-leading cause of death in the United States. Smokers are especially likely to develop COPD. A recent study looked at whether dietary factors also play a role.

Cured meats like bacon, hot dogs, and deli meats contain nitrites, which are added as preservatives. Nitrites, which are also present in tobacco smoke, can damage lung tissue. Frequent consumption of cured meats containing nitrites could potentially cause damage to the lungs. (Of course, if you're choosing vegetarian products such as veggie bacon, dogs, and deli slices, you don't have to worry about nitrites since these foods don't contain them.)

Epidemiologists looked at more than 71,000 registered nurses and found that those who consumed cured meats most frequently were most likely to have COPD. Those at lowest risk for COPD were women who

never smoked and who rarely or never ate cured meat; those at highest risk were current smokers who ate four or more servings of cured meat a week. You might guess that smokers were more likely to eat cured meats. They were, but the increased risk of COPD in women who ate cured meat was seen even when adjustments were made for smoking. Similar results were seen in an earlier study of male health professionals done by the same researchers. This study provides one more reason to choose a vegetarian diet (and to stop or never start smoking).

Jiang R, Camargo Jr CA, Varraso R, et al. 2008. Consumption of cured meats and prospective risk of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease in women. *Am J Clin Nutr* 87:1002-1008.

Is There a Connection Between Poor Diet and Higher Stress Levels?

Stress and anxiety are often seen as a part of today's rapid pace. In some cases, mild stress can lead to improved performance. However, enduring constant stress and anxiety can be debilitating and increase risk for chronic diseases like heart disease.

Do dietary factors play a role in stress? That's the question researchers from Greece asked when they studied close to 1,000 men and women. Subjects of this small study were asked questions about their diet and their current level of anxiety; nervousness and worry was assessed. Among women, those who described themselves as less anxious ate less red meat and fewer sweets than women who described themselves as more anxious. The less anxious women were more likely to eat a vegetarian or near-vegetarian diet. Less anxious men also tended to eat a healthier diet. The researchers speculate that during times of stress, people are more likely to choose convenient and familiar foods like meat, potatoes, and soft drinks. One question that is raised by this study is whether a more vegetarian-like diet contributed to reduced feelings of anxiety and stress rather than simply being the result of less anxiety and stress.

Yannakoulia M, Panagiotakos DB, Pitsavos C, et al. Eating habits in relations to anxiety symptoms among apparently healthy adults: A pattern analysis from the ATTICA Study. *Appetite* 2008 Apr 8. [Epub ahead of print].

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