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Sausages, Ham Are Cancer-Causing, Red Meat 'Probably' Too: UN Agency

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The findings support "recommendations to limit intake of meat," said the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), which compiled a review of more than 800 studies on the link between a meat diet and cancer.

"In view of the large number of people who consume processed meat, the global impact on cancer incidence is of public health importance," IARC official Kurt Straif said in a statement.

For an individual, the risk of getting cancer from eating processed meat was statistically "small", said the agency, but "increases with the amount of meat consumed."

"Each 50-gram (1.8-ounce) portion of processed meat eaten daily increases the risk of colorectal cancer by 18 per cent."

The report was compiled by 22 experts from 10 countries.

The evaluation revealed "strong mechanistic evidence supporting a carcinogenic effect" for red meat consumption -- mainly for cancer of the colon and rectum, but also the pancreas and prostate, said the agency based in Lyon, France.

Red meat includes beef, veal, pork, lamb, mutton, horse and goat.

As for processed meat, including hot dogs, sausages, corned beef, dried meat like beef jerky or South African biltong, canned meat or meat-based sauces, there was "sufficient evidence in

humans that the consumption of processed meat causes colorectal cancer."

Meat can be processed in various ways, through salting, curing, fermentation or smoking.

Given that red meat is an important source of human nutrition, the results should help governments and regulatory agencies balance the risk and benefits of eating meat, said the agency.

It did not make a finding on whether the cooking method of meat affects the cancer risk.

The agency added processed meat to the same category of cancer-causing agents as tobacco smoke and asbestos, but stressed this did not mean it was just as dangerous.

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