

Are Organ Meats Good for You?

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✓ Fact Checked

September 01, 2023

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › While by today's standards some may find eating organ meats to be an unsavory proposition, most are more nutrient dense than your average pork chop or T-bone, containing high amounts of protein, minerals and fat-soluble vitamins
- › Some believe organ meats are unhealthy as they're the filters for toxins in the animals they came from, but while they may be the filters, they're not the storehouses; organs filter toxins and remove them
- › Eating organ meat rather than meat from muscles may decrease your intake of an amino acid known as methionine and, as a consequence, may also improve metabolic health and help you live longer
- › Concerns regarding eating too much organ meat include the potential harm from its high iron content, which can build up in your blood, and cooking it at excessively high temperatures, which can form cancer-causing compounds
- › Cooking at lower temperatures, marinating in olive oil or lemon juice and cutting away charred bits are some of the ways you can avoid the formation of harmful compounds when cooking organ meat

Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published March 5, 2018.

For thousands of years, people across the globe have eaten meat not only as a tasty food but to boost energy and vitality. Especially where plentiful, not only have tender fillets, roasts and juicy steaks been consumed, many have actively opted for organ

meats such as liver, heart and kidney. They may not have realized it in earlier epochs, but there's a good chance that their reliance on such "primitive" fare may have provided them with the energy, vitality and overall health to survive.

Some experts contend that the hunter-gatherers of past generations had a "nose to tail" approach to using everything they could from the animals they either hunted or raised for food. In other words, they used not just the muscle meats but the organs and nearly every other portion. Some parts, especially by today's standards, might seem unsavory and unsanitary.

In today's world, however, some (especially in the West) would not consider eating anything but muscle meats like a hearty steak hot off the grill, rarely, if ever, opting for the aforementioned organ meats derived from cows, lambs, chicken, pigs and ducks. Doing so would be considered "awful," but as it turns out, certain offal – the term for animal organs prepared and consumed as food – can be exceptionally nutritious. As Business Ghana/msn.com notes:¹

"Today, most animals are born and raised for their muscle tissues. Organ meats are often overlooked, with most meat typically consumed as steaks, drumsticks or ground into mince. However, hunter-gatherers didn't just eat muscle meat.

They ate the organs too, such as brains, intestines and even testicles. In fact, the organs were highly prized. Organ meats can be a great addition to your diet. They're packed with nutrients, such as vitamin B12 and folate, and they're also an excellent source of iron and protein."

Some believe organ meats aren't healthy to eat because they were the filters for toxins in the animals they came from. In fact it's the most common objection, especially for liver and kidneys. But while they may be the filters, they're not the storehouses, per se. Organs exist to filter toxins, which means they remove toxins, which is why they store so many vitamins and minerals; they're needed to get the job done.

Types of Organ Meats and Nutritional Benefits

The nutritional breakdown of organ meat can vary depending on the animal source and the organ type. Most are in fact even more nutrient dense than your average drumstick or ham hock, containing high amounts of protein, minerals including iron, selenium, magnesium and zinc, major fat-soluble vitamins such as A, D, E and K, important for mineral absorption, plus several B vitamins like B-12 and folate. Commonly consumed organ meats include:

- Liver, one of the most nutritious, being the “detox” organ sometimes called “nature’s multivitamin”
- Kidneys, which generally come in pairs and function as filters to filter out toxins and waste from your blood
- Heart, the pump that circulates blood throughout the body
- Brain, a delicacy in some cultures, provides a rich store of omega-3 fatty acids
- Tongue, technically a muscle, is known as a tasty, tender source of healthy fat

Two other organ offerings (with names that are a bit confusing regarding what they really are) include tripe, which may sound more like a fish or a bird but is actually an animal’s stomach lining. The three types of beef tripe, [The Spruce](#)² explains, represent the three different chambers of a cow’s stomach. Preparation involves cleaning, removing the impurities, trimming away unwanted fat, rubbing with rock salt and rinsing with vinegar.

It can be a lengthy process that prepares the organs for “a myriad of delicious beef tripe dishes,” which can be grilled, stewed and made into a soup. There’s also sweetbreads, which are neither sweet nor bread but rather thymus gland and pancreas, often from lamb, veal, beef or pork. They can be grilled, breaded, seared or fried for a smooth, tender texture and mild, creamy flavor, according to [The Kitchn](#).³

More Benefits From Eating Organ Meats

Organ meat consumption imparts a number of nutrients and other benefits that make finding your favorite type and preparation worth the effort it may take to get the best

available, which introduces the importance of obtaining your organ meats (and all meats, for that matter) from organic, grass fed animals.

Organ meats are the densest source of nutrition and are considered the superfoods of the animal kingdom. Not only are they safe to eat but rich in amino acids and CoQ10. Here are more benefits:

- **Iron**, the source of which is highly bioavailable heme iron that your body is able to absorb more easily than non-heme iron obtained from plant sources.⁴
- Organ meats keep you full longer due to the high protein content, which may help you eat less. They can even promote weight loss by increasing your metabolism.⁵
- They're one of the world's richest sources of choline, an essential nutrient for your brain, muscle and liver health that many peoples' diets are lacking in.⁶
- Organ meat consumption is one way to build and retain muscle mass due to the high-quality protein they provide.⁷
- Because they're not often as sought after compared to other meats, they're less expensive to purchase.

Meat – or More Specifically, Fat – Became Demonized

Health blogger, teacher and presenter in the featured video, Denise Minger (incidentally a former vegan), believes that while there may be a few concerns about eating meat, they can easily be alleviated by making a few simple adjustments. Minger outlines some of the ways eating meat and fat in particular fell out of favor with the American public, and the steps that led to a misconception that has without a doubt negatively impacted the way people view food.

Around the end of the 18th century, industrialized farming changed the way things were done on what had been largely family-run operations. The growing number of slaughterhouses and commercial production methods increased not only meat availability but the amount eaten per consumer. Simultaneously, organ meat was too time-consuming for companies to bother with.

Government Entities 'Do a 180' Influencing Public Perception

In the 1970s, large government agencies such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the American Heart Association (AHA) began warning people not to consume too much cholesterol. Interestingly, the AHA, back in 1957, said it was skeptical about any kind of link between fat intake and heart disease, so there was no evidence that would necessitate recommending people to change their diets.

However, in 1960, the AHA “did a 180,” Minger explained. The narrative turned to advising overweight people, those who’d already suffered a heart attack or stroke, had **high cholesterol** or blood pressure, or experienced a high-stress lifestyle to decrease their fat and meat intake. But just as there was no evidence for this step to be taken just three years earlier, there was still no evidence – just a changeover of four committee members, one of whom was Ancel Keys.

If that name doesn’t ring a bell, Keys was largely responsible for the war on fat, as he convinced the health community – and thus the public at large – that eating a diet high in saturated fat was the culprit in heart disease, an assertion that was incorrect then just as it is now. Seventeen years later, the McGovern Report (named after Sen. George McGovern), aka the Dietary Goals of the United States, persisted with this advice. The problem was, it was more political than scientific.

In addition, a vegetarian named Rick Mottern was responsible for writing the guidelines, and it was enough to shape future nutrition policies. Once these recommendations were released to the public and became national policy, they also became the basis for at least 30 years of faulty science. The Food Pyramid instilled in every student in the nation was built on it, and U.S. dietary guidelines still are.

The Negative Role of Methionine in Muscle Meats

To be fair, meat may have some issues, particularly when it comes from concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) but, as Minger says, a few simple tweaks in your approach to meat may enhance your health. When you focus on muscle meats to the

exclusion of other parts of the animal, Minger explains, there's another issue with an amino acid known as methionine. Methionine, she notes:

- Generates homocysteine, which can be a problem for people with the inability to recycle homocysteine, which correlates with blood coagulation and, in turn, raises heart disease risk
- Can deplete the amino acid glycine, which is abundant and necessary for your skin and connective tissue
- Can restrict blood levels of glutathione, a powerful antioxidant found in every one of your cells that functions in ways that maximize the other antioxidants in your body

The upshot is organ meats and, indeed, eating all of what an animal offers in the way of nutrition allows for an optimal balance of amino acids, Minger asserts. It also offers some of the same benefits as calorie restriction, not to mention that it may extend your life span, one study indicates.⁸ One of the easiest ways to take advantage of these benefits is to make your own bone broth.

Legitimate Issues With Meat

Another issue with meat: It's very likely that you know people who refer to themselves as meat lovers, but it's fair to say many of them eat significantly more meat on any given day than is healthy. There are some very real correlations between excess protein, largely derived from meat, the onset of cancer and overall aging, not just in appearance but on a cellular level. Balancing the amino acids derived from the meat you eat can help balance that.

Cooking meats until they're charred or otherwise overcooked, usually through grilling but also via broiling, frying and deep-frying, releases unhealthy compounds like heterocyclic amines (HCAs), advanced glycation end products (AGEs) and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), which can form as some of the nutrients react with other components at excessively high temperatures.⁹ Alleviate this by:

- Cooking at lower temperatures (avoid temperatures in excess of 300 degrees Fahrenheit)
- Cut away charred bits
- Marinate meats in olive oil, garlic, lemon juice or red wine, which may lower HCAs by as much as 90%¹⁰
- Flip the meat frequently
- Use alternate cooking methods, such as baking, steaming and boiling

Red meat is also higher in iron than may be healthy for you, as it may build up in your blood and cause iron toxicity,¹¹ which is particularly problematic for those with a genetic disorder called hereditary hemochromatosis.¹² Alleviate symptoms by donating blood regularly, drinking coffee or tea with high-iron meals, avoiding foods with a lot of vitamin C when eating foods containing iron, as it increases iron absorption, and, naturally, by eating less red meat.

Bringing Back Traditional Foods

It's largely been misinformation and lack of familiarity that has caused people in the U.S. to avoid eating offal or organ meats, but the perspective that once shaped how people in today's fast food culture look at food is that organ meats are necessary for not just survival but for vitality and health.

But the tide, as it were, is shifting. More people than ever are understanding that what is placed on market shelves may not be best for their health, even if it is sanctioned by some of the most important health and safety entities in the country, such as the USDA and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

If you're interested in bringing organ meats back into your life, make sure that they're produced with quality, and the best way to ensure this is to find a local source where the animals they come from were grass fed and not given grains, and not dosed with antibiotics, which contributes to the spread of deadly antibiotic-resistant disease, but is profitable as the animals grow faster on less food.

Further, do your homework to ensure the animals didn't come from a CAFO. These operations are where animals are packed into tight quarters, fed unnatural diets, and often live in inhumane and cruel environments where disease flourishes. Paying attention to what you eat – but also where your food comes from, including meats and organ meats – is crucial for your health and well-being of you and your family, and further ensures that you are able to take control of your health.

Sources and References

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