EPIDEMIOLOGY

Diet changes for longevity

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The consumption of red meat, especially processed meat, is associated with a wide range of chronic diseases and premature death. However, up to now, there has been no evidence of how changes in red meat consumption might affect mortality and what alternative foods might be associated with greater longevity.

A new study by Yan Zheng, of Fudan and Harvard Universities, and colleagues examined the effects of changes in red meat and other foods consumption in two large prospective cohorts of US women and men: the Nurses' Health Study and the Health Professionals Follow-up Study. By analysing data over the period 1994–2010 for 53,553 women and 27,916 men, the authors found that increasing the amount of red meat consumed by at least half a serving a day was associated with a 10% higher mortality risk. When looking at increases in consumption of processed red meat only, mortality risk was even higher (13%). Although decreasing red meat consumption alone did not appear to confer lesser mortality risk, simultaneously increasing the consumption of whole grains, vegetables, or other protein sources was associated with a reduction in mortality risk.

This study suggests that replacing red meat (especially processed meat) with healthy alternative choices can help promote longevity.

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