

# Senior Scene



## What seniors should know about red meat

As people age, their dietary habits may need to be modified in protection of their long-term health. Seniors may be advised to avoid certain foods, including red meat.

The consensus regarding seniors and red meat now emphasizes balance. Red meat, which consists of beef, lamb and pork, offers bio-available nutrients that are difficult to get from plants alone. Red meat contains vitamin B12, which is crucial for cognitive function and nerve health. Since absorption of B12 often declines with age, according to UCLA Health, it can be challenging to get enough.

Red meat contains heme iron, which is more easily absorbed by the body than the non-heme iron found in beans or spinach. Iron helps ward off age-related anemia, according to UMass Memorial Health. High-quality protein also is essential to combat age-related muscle loss, a condition known as sarcopenia.

Despite the ben-

efits of red meat, the American Heart Association and the World Cancer Research Fund suggest moderation because of the impact it may have on cardiovascular health. Many cuts of red meat are high in saturated fats, which have the potential to elevate LDL (bad) cholesterol. For seniors with a history of elevated lipid panels or heart disease, leaner cuts of red meat are key. Alternative protein sources also should be chosen more often than red meat.

Limiting red meat also can help combat digestive system concerns. As a person ages, the digestive system produces less stomach acid, says Cary Gastroenterology Associates. That makes it harder to break down heavy proteins like red meat. This can lead to bloating or discomfort if too much is consumed.

Certain studies have explored the link between high red meat consumption and systemic inflammation that can aggravate conditions like arthritis. Baylor College of Med-

icine says high levels of saturated fat and omega-6 fatty acids could elevate inflammatory markers like C-reactive protein, exacerbating autoimmune conditions and other health issues.

Best practices for seniors concerning red meat

## Safe ways seniors can lose weight

The prevalence of obesity among adults 60 and older is significant. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 39 percent of adults 60 and over met the criteria for obesity over a two-year period between August 2021 and August 2023.

The National Council on Aging notes the importance of maintaining a healthy weight as you age. Seniors who qualify as obese, which occurs when a person's body accumulates and stores excessive amounts of body fat, carry a higher risk of chronic diseases like type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and certain types of cancer. The NCOA also notes that excess body weight puts a strain on the joints, increasing the risk for osteoarthritis and making daily movements more difficult. People with obesity also are more likely to develop asthma and sleep apnea.

Seniors diagnosed

with obesity are urged to seek safe and healthy ways to lose weight. Fad diets and other means to quick weight loss can be dangerous, but the NCOA notes simple lifestyle changes and healthy habits can help seniors safely lose weight.

• Consume nutrient-dense foods. Lean proteins, whole grains, fruits, and vegetables offer plenty of vitamins, minerals and fiber but tend to be low in calories. That makes them ideal options for people looking to lose weight, as they contribute to feelings of fullness without consuming a lot of calories.

• Incorporate physical activity into your daily routine. Exercise can pose problems for older adults who qualify as obese. The joint issues that can affect older adults with obesity can make traditional exercise regimens that incorporate strength training and moderate to vig-

orous aerobic activity very difficult, and maybe even dangerous. But the NCOA notes that exercise need not be intense to be effective. Walking is a great physical activity for older adults. Swimming also is excellent, as it provides a full-body workout that's easy on the joints. Seniors are urged to speak with their physicians about physical activities they can handle.

the 2026 guidelines represent a significant shift that promotes higher consumption of red meat, full-fat dairy and animal proteins, rather than restricting them to one to two times per week, despite advising limiting saturated fat

intake. These contradictory messages may confuse the average person.

As with all dietary recommendations, advice will vary depending on one's specific needs and underlying medical conditions.

ies to get better rest at night.

• Work to combat stress. The NCOA reports that stress is a contributor to weight gain. And stress and disorders linked to it are perhaps more common among adults 60 and over than people realize. In fact, according to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, anxiety disorders, which are a notable source of ongoing stress, are the most widespread mental health condition among older adults. Sufficient sleep, meditation and deep breathing exercises can help seniors combat stress, and that in turn may help older adults avoid excess weight gain.

Obesity is a problem among older adults. Finding safe ways to lose weight can have a profound effect on seniors' short- and long-term health.

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