Study finds red meat as part of a healthy diet linked to reduced risk of multiple sclerosis

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People who consume unprocessed red meat as part of a healthy Mediterranean diet may reduce their risk of multiple sclerosis (MS), new research led by Curtin University and The Australian National University has found.

The research, published in *The Journal of Nutrition*, examined data from 840 Australians who took part in the Ausimmune Study to determine whether there was a link between consuming a Mediterranean diet that includes unprocessed red meat, such as lamb, beef and pork, and a reduced risk of a first episode of CNS demyelination, a common precursor to MS.

Lead author Dr. Lucinda Black, from the School of Public Health at Curtin University who completed the research as part of her MSWA Postdoctoral Fellowship, said the number of people being diagnosed with MS was increasing globally, suggesting that environmental factors such as low sun exposure, low vitamin D, and poor diet may be

contributing factors.

"Previous research suggests that a Mediterranean diet can help to reduce the risk of certain health issues, including cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancer, Alzheimer's disease and dementia and improve overall life expectancy. However, there is inconclusive evidence to suggest a Mediterranean diet also reduces the risk of developing MS," Dr. Black said.

"Our research found that consuming one daily serving (65 g) of unprocessed red meat as part of a healthy Mediterranean diet may be beneficial for those at high risk of developing MS.

"It is unclear why consuming red meat combined with a healthy diet may lower the risk of MS, but red meat contains important macro and micronutrients including protein, iron, zinc, selenium, potassium, vitamin D, and a range of B-vitamins, many of which are important for healthy neurological function."

To ensure that the risks do not outweigh the benefits, Cancer Council WA recommends eating only a moderate amount of unprocessed lean red meat, which equates to no more than one daily serving, where a serving is 65 grams of cooked meat.

Co-author Professor Robyn Lucas, from The Australian National University in Canberra, said the research highlighted the importance of educating people who are at a higher risk of MS about the impact of their diet and other environmental factors.

"We know very little about how people can reduce their risk of developing MS, but previous research has shown that not smoking and ensuring people get sufficient sun exposure to maintain adequate

vitamin D levels may contribute to this," Professor Lucas said.

"This new work provides valuable information on another way that people at high risk of MS might reduce that risk, which includes eating a healthy, Mediterranean diet that includes moderate amounts of unprocessed red meat."

The Ausimmune Study, funded by the National Multiple Sclerosis Society of the United States of America, the National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia, and Multiple Sclerosis Research Australia, was conducted during 2003 and 2006 in four regions of Australia, including Brisbane, Newcastle, western Victoria, and Tasmania. The study investigated the link between environmental risk factors and early symptoms of MS.

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