

Red meat and women

Women generally require fewer calories (energy) than men and tend to eat smaller quantities of food, particularly if they are attempting to lose weight.

As a consequence, their intake of important nutrients, compared to men, tends to be smaller. This makes women's food selection extremely important if they are to ensure adequate intakes of vital micronutrients. Eating nutrient-dense foods, such as red meat, can help to ensure that intakes of essential nutrients are adequate.

Women's Nutrient Requirements

Despite a generally lower intake of nutrients, women's requirements for vitamins and minerals and trace elements are not less than those of men and in some instances (e.g. iron) are higher, primarily due to menstrual losses. Women may also have an increased need for micronutrients such as folate, zinc and vitamin B12 as a result of pregnancy and lactation. Women are therefore more vulnerable to poor diets than men. Younger women are particularly vulnerable owing to poor diets and unhealthy lifestyle practices such as excessive alcohol intake, low levels of physical activity and misguided food restriction for weight loss.

Weight Loss

Lean red meat is a major source of protein and higher protein diets can help with weight management as they help with hunger management and appetite control. Incorporating additional lean protein, such as red meat, into a calorie-reduced moderate fat diet, as well as improving the palatability of the diet also improves the ability to stick to the diet.

Dietary Awareness

Although women, especially older women, tend to be more proactive than men in taking care of their health, their perception of what is important is not always accurate. A survey by online resource www.meatandhealth.com (2010) found that almost half of women believed spinach to be the best source of iron. In fact, you would need to eat a very large amount of spinach to get the same amount of iron as there is available in a 4oz (100g) sirloin steak.

Haem iron is the more easily absorbed form of iron found in red meat and animal tissues while non-haem iron, which is less easily absorbed, is found in vegetables

and cereals. Meat is a useful way of boosting iron intake as it also enhances the absorption of iron from plant foods.

Top tips for boosting iron intake:

- Use extra-lean mince to make lasagne, spaghetti Bolognese, meatballs, cottage pie and homemade burgers. A dinner of spaghetti Bolognese with whole-wheat pasta will provide 6.6mg iron – that's 47% of the RNI – while a burger in a wholemeal bap with salad provides 5.4mg of iron, and a plate of cottage pie contains 3.7mg iron.
- Choose red meat – the darker the flesh, the higher the iron content. This means beef contains more iron than lamb and pork. Leg meat in poultry is generally higher in iron than breast meat, which in turn contains more than most types of salmon.
- Start the day with a bowl of breakfast cereal and semi-skimmed milk. Many breakfast cereals are fortified with iron so that a standard bowl provides 6mg of iron. This iron isn't as well absorbed as the iron in meat so add a vitamin C-rich fruit such as blackcurrants or strawberries, or a glass of fruit juice to help the body to absorb this iron.

In Conclusion

A good food selection is extremely important for women as they generally eat less food than men. They are therefore more at risk of having inadequate intakes of vital micronutrients. Red meat is a nutrient-dense food and can play an important part in a healthy balanced diet for women by contributing key nutrients such as iron and zinc. As a rich source of protein, red meat can also aid successful weight loss by helping with hunger management and appetite control.

For more information please visit: www.meatandhealth.com