

Can Replacing Meat With Impossible Burgers Help Reduce Cancer Risk?

The truth about plant-based meat substitutes like Impossible Foods and Beyond Meat

August 2, 2019 By [Casey Halter](#)

Plant-based meat substitutes like the Impossible Burger and Beyond Meat have been making waves lately—their popularity fueled, in part, by growing unease about red meat, a recent article in *Self* reports.

The article explains that one reason so many meat lovers are switching over to plant-based burgers is their increased availability thanks to recent partnerships with such restaurant chains as Carl's Jr. and TGI Friday's. Additionally, polling data, research and expert interviews show that people are also concerned about the cancer and heart disease risks associated with eating red meat.

Plenty of research suggests that eating red meat frequently may increase the risk for myriad poor health outcomes, including cancer.

For example, a 2012 study funded by the National Institutes of Health found that eating an extra daily serving of red meat a day increased a person's risk of dying from any cause by 12%. In 2002, a World Health Organization (WHO) study found a correlation between eating red meat and colorectal cancer as well as associations with pancreatic and prostate cancers. As a result, WHO currently considers all red meat, including beef, pork and lamb, to be “probably carcinogenic.”

Citing research showing that eating a lot of saturated fat can also increase the risk for heart disease, medical organizations, including the American Cancer Society and the American Heart Association, recommend that people reduce their meat intake.

But whether switching to plant-based alternatives reduces cancer risk is less clear than many might think. The authors of the WHO report on meat admitted that the mechanism at the heart of the correlation with colorectal cancer wasn't clear and that the increased cancer risk could have been just as easily linked to chemicals produced during cooking or processing rather than to the meat itself. It's also clear that eating processed meats, such as bacon and luncheon meats, has a stronger association with increased cancer risk, particularly for colon cancer, than red meat such as steaks and burgers. (See “[Can Daily Consumption of Meat Increase Colorectal Cancer Risk?](#)”)

What's more, even though it may be healthier to cut back on red meat, whether the meat alternatives we're replacing them with are more nutritious is still a bit of an open question. After looking into the nutrition facts for meat substitutes like the Impossible Burger and Beyond Burger, the author of the Self article found that they are pretty similar to those of regular burgers when it comes to fat, saturated fat, calories and protein content—although plant-based burgers contain a lot more fiber—as well as sodium—than their meaty counterparts.

For those interested, the article also discusses research behind whether eating plant-based meat is better for the environment, which turns out to be a much more convincing claim. To read more about that, [click here](#).

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