

# RE- Think Beef

## The Untold Story

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### Beef and Health: The Untold Story

There's lots to know about beef. Some things you know, but maybe some things you don't. With diets getting steadily worse and obesity levels rising, there are some good reasons to consider why beef belongs on the tables of Canadians.

#### Do Canadians eat too much red meat? In fact, no we don't.

- Considering there are 21 meals in a week, Canadians eat only 3 servings of fresh red meat per week<sup>1</sup> – that's one lunch and two dinners for example, and this includes pork, lamb and beef. How big is a serving? Only 100 grams – that's a steak about the size of your palm.
- Think red meat is on the rise as part of Canadian eating patterns? At a 14 gram decrease per day compared to what we ate in 2004, the fact is that there is less red meat than ever in Canadian diets.<sup>2</sup>
- It's important to eat a balanced plate that's ½ veg and/or fruit, ¼ whole grains, and ¼ protein-rich foods like meat. Increase your veggies – for sure, but with only 5% of our calories coming from unprocessed red meat (and almost 50% from ultra processed foods), worrying about red meat is like trying to fix the wrong problem.<sup>1,5</sup>

#### Canadians have replaced foundational foods, like beef, with junk food.

- Over the last 30 years, obesity rates have tripled,<sup>3</sup> while the percent of calories we get from high-quality protein foods including beef, milk and eggs has significantly declined.<sup>4</sup>
- Ultra-processed food now accounts for almost ½ our daily calories. And alarmingly, our kids are the worst: 9 to 13 year olds get a whopping 57% of their calories from nutritionally poor, high calorie foods such as pizza, pop, crackers and baked goods.<sup>5</sup>

#### Is chicken better for you than beef? Maybe not so much...

- Both chicken and beef are nutrient-dense quality protein foods – it shouldn't be a matter of one or the other. With much to offer in key nutrients like iron, vitamin B<sub>12</sub> and zinc, beef belongs at your table. Beef has more of these nutrients than chicken by 220%, 600% and 750%, respectively.<sup>6</sup>
- Beef qualifies as a “good” or “excellent” source of 9 nutrients, while chicken only meets this criteria for 5 nutrients.<sup>7</sup>
- Lean and Extra Lean Ground Beef have the same maximum fat content as Lean and Extra Lean Ground Chicken or Turkey. The terms that are used to describe maximum fat levels for ground meats apply to all ground meats and poultry and are defined by labelling laws.<sup>8</sup>

#### And on the topic of fat...

- On average, fresh red meat contributes only 7% of the fat consumed in the diet of Canadians.<sup>9</sup>
- More than half of the fat in beef is unsaturated. In fact, most of the unsaturated fat in beef is oleic acid, the same type of healthy fat found in avocados. You know, those “healthy fats” we're all told to eat.<sup>10</sup>
- Based on an average composite of beef cuts, beef qualifies for the Health Canada claim 'lean'.<sup>11</sup>



## Are “plant-based” diets better for you?

- Each food in the diet contributes a unique nutrient ‘package’. Plant-based foods offer benefits like fibre and folate, nutrients not present in meat. Animal-based foods contribute vitamin B<sub>12</sub>, omega-3 fats, complete protein, heme iron and zinc, nutrients not available from plants. **So why the debate? It’s simply not a matter of one or the other.**
- While it’s true that most people should up their intake of vegetables, this shouldn’t necessarily be at the expense of animal based foods. Better strategy? Up your veggies to replace nutrient poor ultra-processed foods like pop, chips and fast foods.
- Vegetarians need almost twice as much iron in their diets as meat eaters since the iron from plant sources is not well absorbed.<sup>12</sup>

## Plant and animal foods are simply better together.

- Eating meat improves nutrient absorption from plant foods. Known as the ‘meat factor’, when meat is eaten

with vegetables that contain iron, the absorption of iron from the plant food is improved by up to 150%.<sup>13</sup>

- The fibre in plants helps improve the digestion of meat. These foods belong together.

## Protein foods are not created equal.

- No other food beats meat when it comes to protein quality. Meats are ‘complete’ proteins with all the indispensable amino acids that humans need and they are easiest for the body to absorb. Plant foods are not complete proteins.
- Meat is much more protein dense with more protein per calorie than what plant protein foods have. Consider this: you would have to eat more than 1 cup of almonds (over 3 servings) at 960 calories to get the same amount of protein (35g) that’s in 1 portion of beef at 250 calories.<sup>14</sup>
- Nuts, seeds, lentils, chickpeas and beans cannot make the claim ‘rich in protein’. Animal sourced protein foods can – meat is rich in protein.<sup>15</sup>

1. Canadian Community Health Surveys (Nutrition) 2015, Statistics Canada.

2. Canadian Community Health Surveys (Nutrition) 2004 and 2015, Statistics Canada.

3. Canadian Health Measures Survey: Household and physical measures data, 2012 to 2013. Statistics Canada 2014.

4. Slater J., et al. The growing Canadian energy gap: more the can than the couch? Public Health Nutr. 2009 Nov;12(11):2216-24.

5. Moubarac JC. Ultra-processed foods in Canada: consumption, impact on diet quality and policy implications. Montréal: TRANSNUT, University of Montreal; December 2017.

6. Nutrient data derived from Health Canada, Canadian Nutrient File, 2015, food codes: Beef 6172, Chicken, 842.

7. Claim statements based on values per 100g cooked, from Health Canada, Canadian Nutrient File, 2015 version, food codes: Beef 6172, Chicken, 842, using 2016 CFIA labelling regulations and Health Canada’s 2016 Nutrition Labelling – Table of Daily Values.

8. Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Nutrient Content Claim Requirements for Fat. 2016.

9. Fresh and Processed Meat Intake: A Canadian Perspective (2018). Data derived from the 2015 Canadian Community Health Survey – Nutrition.

10. Health Canada, Canadian Nutrient File, 2015. Food code 6172: Beef, composite cuts, steak/roast, lean and fat, cooked.

11. Health Canada, Canadian Nutrient File, 2015. Food code 6172, beef, composite cuts, steak/roast, lean and fat, cooked.

12. Institute of Medicine. 2001. Dietary Reference Intakes for Vitamin A, Vitamin K, Arsenic, Boron, Chromium, Copper, Iodine, Iron, Manganese, Molybdenum, Nickel, Silicon, Vanadium, and Zinc. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

13. Engelmann, M, Davidsson, L, Sandstrom, B, Walczyk, T, Hurrell, R, & Michaelsen, K. (1998). The influence of meat on nonheme iron absorption in infants. Pediatric Research, 43(6), 768-773.

14. Protein value calculated based on 100g cooked beef. Health Canada, Canadian Nutrient File, 2015. Food codes: Almonds 2534, Beef 6172.

15. Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Nutrient Content Claim Requirements for Protein. 2016.



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