

# RED MEAT MATTERS



## Red meat delivers essential nutrients

Fact

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*The Australian dietary guidelines recommend we enjoy lean red meat (beef, lamb and veal) 3 to 4 times a week. Why?*

### Lean red meat is nutrient-dense

Humans have been eating red meat for millions of years. Today, lean red meat remains a core food in the diet of most Australians providing a wide range of essential nutrients.

- **Protein** – red meat is a significant source of high-quality protein, providing all the essential amino acids. Just 100g of raw red meat contains around 20-25g of protein.<sup>1</sup> The protein in beef and lamb is highly digestible – around 94 per cent compared with the digestibility of 78 per cent in beans and 86 per cent in whole wheat.<sup>2</sup>
- **Iron** – Lean red meat is one of the richest sources of haem-iron in the Australian diet which is better absorbed than non-haem iron found in plant foods.<sup>3</sup> Because of this the requirement of iron is 80 per cent higher for individuals who are strict vegetarians.<sup>4</sup> Iron is important in the transport of oxygen, production of energy and is essential for brain development.
- **Zinc** – Lean red meat is a good source of zinc, an essential nutrient for the immune system, growth and wound healing.<sup>5</sup> The zinc in red meat and other animal foods is better absorbed than from plant foods. Because of this the requirement of zinc is 50 per cent higher for individuals who are strict vegetarians.<sup>4</sup>
- **B-group vitamins** – Lean red meat is an important source of B-group vitamins including riboflavin, niacin, pantothenic acid, vitamin B6 and in particular vitamin B12.<sup>1</sup> Vitamin B12 cannot be found in plant foods, therefore inadequate intakes of B12 are a problem in strict vegetarians.<sup>4</sup> Lacking vitamin B12 can adversely affect neurological function including memory and concentration.
- **Omega-3 fatty acids** – After fish, red meat makes the second highest contribution of omega-3s to the Australian diet.<sup>6</sup> It is an important natural source of long-chain omega-3s having levels greater than 30mg in a 150g serving.<sup>1</sup> Omega-3s are essential to the healthy functioning of the nervous system and important to heart health.

## Lean red meat an important part of a healthy, balanced diet

Lean red meat plays an important role in a healthy diet, being eaten and enjoyed by millions of people around the world. The scientific and medical communities agree eating red meat as part of a healthy balanced diet is beneficial to health with our own dietary guidelines recommending Australians eat lean red meat 3 to 4 times a week.<sup>5</sup>

### Summary of key points:

- The Australian dietary guidelines recommend we enjoy lean red meat 3 to 4 times a week.
- Lean red meat delivers vital nutrients, like protein, iron, zinc, vitamin B12 and long-chain omega-3s.

#### References:

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3. Shrapnel B and Baghurst K, (2007): "Lack of nutritional equivalence in the 'meats and alternatives' group of the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating," **Nutrition & Dietetics**; in press.
4. National Health and Medical Research Council, (2006): "Nutrient Reference Values for Australia and New Zealand including Recommended Dietary Intakes," Canberra: Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing.
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6. Howe P et al, (2006): "Dietary intake of long-chain omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids: contribution of meat sources," **Nutrition**; 22:47-53.



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Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) represents the beef, sheepmeat and goatmeat producers of Australia and manages research and development, marketing and promotions on behalf of the industry. MLA has a commitment to providing Australians with accurate nutrition information and promotes the role of red meat as part of a healthy, balanced diet.