

# Nutrition & Health

## MEAT'S CONTRIBUTION TO A HEALTHY AND BALANCED DIET



Meat is highly nutritious food that plays an important part in a balanced diet



Beef, lamb and pork are rich in vitamin B6 which helps to boost energy, reduce tiredness and helps the immune system to function



Vitamin B12 - which beef, lamb and pork are all rich in - supports bone health and is especially important during pregnancy



Beef, lamb and pork are rich sources of niacin, which helps reduce tiredness and fatigue



Beef, lamb and pork are naturally rich in protein and low in sodium, and contain vitamins and minerals that are important for a healthy diet



Meat contributes 18% of the iron in the Irish diet, and meat is an easy way to absorb iron



The Department of Health's Food Pyramid includes meat as part of a healthy, balanced diet



One in four plant-based meat-substitute products are not a source of protein, according to safe food

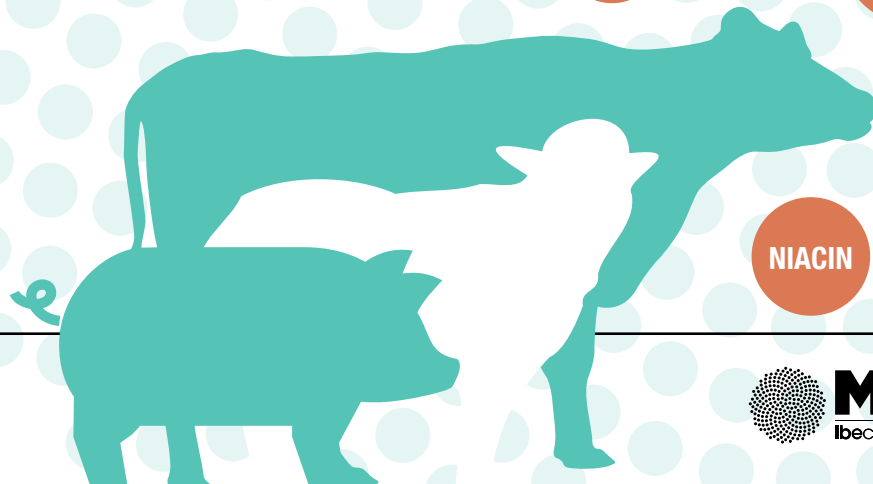
### Overview

Meat is a rich source of high quality, naturally occurring protein and contains essential vitamins and minerals that contribute to good health and play an important role in a healthy diet. Red meats such as beef, lamb and pork help us to maintain a balanced diet and ensure a person is receiving the vitamins and minerals needed.

Meat has a high nutrient density and is an important source of iron, zinc and omega-3. These vitamins and minerals are essential to keep the body and brain functioning.

Meat is also an important natural source of B vitamins, including B12, which is only naturally sourced in animal-derived foods.

As consumer tastes change it is useful for consumers to understand and learn more about the health benefits of including meat in their diets.



## Health benefits of meat

Meat is a rich source of high-quality protein and has a positive impact on overall health by helping to build muscle and prevent iron deficiency.

**Building muscle mass:** The best dietary sources of protein are animal-derived foods, such as meat. Protein plays a vital role to help us build and maintain lean muscle mass. Protein is the building block our body uses to repair and make bone, muscle, skin, and cartilage.

Beef, lamb and pork are naturally rich in protein, low in sodium, and contain all of the essential amino acids. Inadequate protein intake may accelerate age-related muscle wasting.

**Anaemia prevention:** Anaemia is a common condition, characterised by a decreased number of red blood cells and reduced ability of the blood to carry oxygen. Iron deficiency is one of the most common causes of anaemia. The type of iron found in red meat (haem iron) is more easily absorbed and used by the body than the iron in plant foods (non-haem iron).

## Nutritional Facts

Meat is a nutrient dense food which provide quality protein, the vital minerals iron and zinc, and the B group vitamins: B12, B1, B2, B3 and B6. They also contribute to the intake of selenium and vitamin D in our diets.

**Protein:** Protein supports bone maintenance and ensures strong healthy bones. You get as much protein from 25g of lean beef - and with half the calories - than you would get from 3 and a half cups of black beans

**Vitamins & Minerals:** Meat is an essential source of Vitamin B:

- Vitamin B12 is only naturally sourced in animal foods and is required to support bone health;
- Vitamin B6 boosts energy, and helps the immune system function; Niacin (Vitamin B3) assists the nervous system to work normally, while also helping to reduce tiredness and fatigue

**Iron & Zinc:** The iron and zinc found in beef and lamb is much more easily absorbed by the body than that found in plant-based foods. Zinc helps with fertility and supports bone health. Iron in the diet is required to avoid anaemia

**Fat:** The fat content of red meat has been considerably reduced over the last few decades through breeding techniques on the farm and new butchery techniques.

## Consumer knowledge

As consumer tastes change, knowledge and education is vital. It is important that consumers understand and learn more about the health benefits of including meat in their diets. Misinformation and misunderstanding can lead to nutrient deficiency.

Professor Frederic Leroy, a food scientist from Brussels University, says it is important that we assess diet from a holistic and balanced position. He argues that many plant-based assessments ignore the important nutritional benefits of animal-based food sources in the human diet and benefits of sourcing local sustainably produced food.

**“A large part of the case against meat is based on cherry-picked evidence and low-quality observational studies. The bald claim that red meat is an ‘unhealthy food’ is wildly unsupported”**

— Prof Frédéric Leroy & Nathan Cofnas, *Critical Reviews in Food Science and Nutrition* (2019)

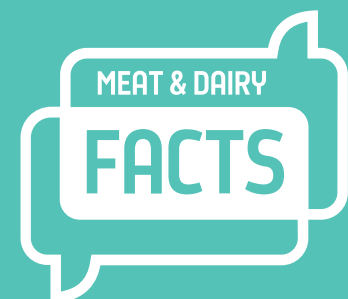
As some consumers turn towards plant-based diets, it is important to understand this can also have environmental impacts. Palm oil plantations have been highly criticised for causing widespread deforestation and pushing animal species further towards extinction. Another common protein replacement, Tofu, is sourced from soybean plantations causing further deforestation and soil erosion.

## Conclusion

Meat is an important component of a healthy, balanced diet by providing an excellent source of protein and essential vitamins and minerals that contribute to good health. Many of the core nutrients we rely on for optimal functionality, including iron and B12, are more easily absorbed and used by the body when sourced from animal-products. In turn, this has long-term benefits to help build muscle and prevent nutrient deficiencies.

While every individual should make their own decisions regarding their dietary choices, arguments in favour of plant-based vegan, vegetarian and flexitarian diets often ignore the important nutritional benefits of animal-based food sources in the human diet and benefits of sourcing local sustainably produced food.

It is extremely important that all consumers have access to accurate and balanced information, to ensure they are well-informed when making any decision on their dietary choices, now and into the future.



More info:  
[meatanddairyfacts.ie](http://meatanddairyfacts.ie)