

# Links between eating red meat and distal colon cancer in women

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A new study suggests that a diet free from red meat significantly reduces the risk of a type of colon cancer in women living in the United Kingdom.

University of Leeds researchers were part of an international team that assessed whether [red meat](#), poultry, fish or vegetarian diets are associated with risk of colon and rectal cancer.

When comparing the effects of these diets to cancer development in specific subsites of the colon, they found that those regularly eating red meat compared to a red meat-free [diet](#) had higher rates of distal colon cancer—cancer found on the descending section of the colon, where faeces is stored.

Lead author Dr Diego Rada Fernandez de Jauregui is part of the Nutritional Epidemiology Group (NEG) at Leeds, and the University of the Basque Country in Spain. He said: "The impact of different types of red meat and [dietary patterns](#) on cancer locations is one of the biggest challenges in the study of diet and [colorectal cancer](#).

"Our research is one of the few studies looking at this relationship and while further analysis in a larger study is needed, it could provide valuable information for those with family history of colorectal cancer and those working on prevention."

More than 2.2 million new cases of colorectal cancer, also known as bowel cancer, are expected worldwide by 2030. It is the third most commonly diagnosed cancer in UK women. Previous studies have suggested that eating lots of red and processed meat increases the risk of colorectal cancer and it is estimated that around 1 in 5 bowel cancers in the UK are linked to eating these meats. However, there is limited available information about specific dietary patterns and the site of cancer occurrence in the bowel.

The study used data from the United Kingdom Women's Cohort Study. This cohort included a total of 32,147 women from England, Wales and Scotland. They were recruited and surveyed by the World Cancer Research fund between 1995 and 1998 and were tracked for an average of 17 years.

In addition to reporting their dietary habits, a total of 462 colorectal cases were documented and of the 335 colon cancers, 119 instances were of distal colon cancer. The study analysis, published today in the International Journal for Cancer, explored the relationship between the four dietary patterns and colorectal cancer and a further exploratory analysis examined the correlation between diet and colon subsites.

Co-author Janet Cade is head of the NEG and Professor of Nutritional Epidemiology and Public Health at the School of Food Science and Nutrition at Leeds. She said: "Our study not only helps shed light on how [meat](#) consumption may affect the sections of the colorectum differently, it emphasises the importance of reliable dietary reporting from large groups of people.

"With access to the United Kingdom Women's Cohort Study we are able to uncover trends in public health and analyse how diet can influence the prevention of [cancer](#). Accurate dietary reporting provides researchers with the information they need to link the two together."

**More information:** Diego Rada-Fernandez de Jauregui et al, Common dietary patterns and risk of cancers of the colon and rectum: Analysis from the United Kingdom Women's Cohort Study (UKWCS), *International Journal of Cancer* (2018). [DOI: 10.1002/ijc.31362](#)

Provided by University of Leeds

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