

Nitrates from Cured Meat Have Been Linked to Mania in New Study

No one mistakes hot dogs for health food, but a new study published in *Molecular Psychiatry* suggests that they might be even worse for you than previously thought, linking hot dog, beef jerky, salami, and processed meats to mania. Examining 1,101 individuals, researchers at Johns Hopkins noticed that the subjects who had been hospitalized for mania were 3.5 times more likely to have consumed cured meats. The same outcome did not occur with other untreated meats or fish. Researchers then fed rats nitrates in a dose equivalent to what a human would eat in a hot dog or beef jerky. The second part of the study confirmed that nitrates negatively impact gut bacteria and the brain. Dr. Robert Yolken, the lead author of the study and professor of neurovirology in pediatrics at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, says,

We looked at a number of different dietary exposures and cured meat really stood out. It wasn't just that people with mania have an abnormal diet...There's growing evidence that germs in the intestines can influence the brain...And this work on nitrates opens the door for future studies on how that may be happening."

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Needed Nitrates

This is not the first time nitrates have been mentioned in conjunction with serious health issues. Past studies have linked the compound with early death, an increased risk of

cancer, and male infertility.

Nitrates are more complicated than that, though. Once they're ingested, they're turned to nitrites by your oral bacteria. From there these nitrites turn into nitric oxide or N-nitroso compounds. Nitric oxide is a free radical, protecting cell mitochondria, and relaxing blood vessels. Plants like celery, spinach, lettuce, onions, broccoli, and peas are excellent sources of naturally occurring nitrates that don't turn into carcinogenic N-nitroso compounds, which are carcinogenic. This is because plants are excellent sources of vitamin c and polyphenols, which keep those compounds from forming.

Naughty Nitrates

Meat, on the other hand, has all the conditions needed for nitrites to turn into carcinogenic N-nitroso. There are no anti-oxidants or polyphenols. Meat also has higher quantities of protein and heme. Heme is an iron-containing compound found in hemoglobin and has been in the news recently as the ingredient responsible for the Impossible Burger's meaty flavor.

Processed meats have nitrites added as a preservative and a coloring. They're responsible for that pink color you see in so many lunch meats. The World Health Organization has classified processed meats as carcinogenic to humans since 2015. Cooking (especially over high heat) makes the numbers of carcinogenic chemicals worse, making hot dogs the worst (seriously, though, the worst).

Gut-Brain Connection

These researchers found a link between human mental illness and a food group. Then they manufactured the same conditions in rats to find an even deeper connection and a greater risk of long-term health conditions.

Related: *Sugar Leads to Depression – World’s First Trial Proves Gut and Brain are Linked (Protocol Included)*

Much has been made of our increasing mental issues. Mania is most commonly associated with bipolar disorder, and diagnoses of that disorder have been on the rise for over a decade. Young people have been hit especially hard. Yet the exact cause of that is unknown.

However, not enough attention has been paid to how crucial the gut-brain connection is. The enteric nervous system controls the function of the gastrointestinal tract and has been referred to as the second brain. It follows that what you fuel the gut with profoundly affects both brains. We are losing our the diversity of our gut bacteria at an alarming rate. We are beginning to see what happens when those microbes are permanently lost.

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How can we take care of this world, of anything else when we’re constantly on the verge of losing control of our own sanity? We often hear about mental health coping strategies or mental health tools for dealing with situations. Why is diet not one of those tools, indeed the very foundation? The gut dictates brain function. What does your brain food look like?

Sources:

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- *Nitrated meat products are associated with mania in humans and altered behavior and brain gene expression in rats – Nature.com*
- *Why Some Nitrates Are Healthy While Others Are Harmful – Dr. Mercola*
- *The Impossible Burger: Inside the Strange Science of the Fake Meat that Bleeds – Wired*
- *WHO report says eating processed meat is carcinogenic:*

Understanding the findings – Harvard School of Public Health

- *Bipolar disorder cases rise sharply in U.S. children* – NY Times