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Meat and poultry

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Summary

- Meat and poultry contain protein, which is important for growth and development, and other nutrients your body needs, such as iodine, iron, zinc and vitamin B12.
- Avoid processed meats to minimise your intake of salt and saturated fat.
- Choose lean cuts of meat and poultry, and follow the recommended serving size.
- Make sure you cook and store meat and poultry safely.

Meat and poultry are great sources of protein. They also provide lots of other nutrients your body needs, like iodine, iron, zinc, vitamins (especially B12) and essential fatty acids.

So it's a good idea to eat meat and poultry every week as part of your balanced diet. But it's best to stick with unprocessed, lean cuts and to eat the recommended serving size, to avoid taking in too much salt and saturated fat.

Why meat and poultry are so good for you

Meat and poultry are very good sources of [protein](#), which is important for growth and development. But did you know they are also full of other things that you need to be healthy? For example:

- iodine to help your body produce thyroid hormone
- iron to carry oxygen around your body
- zinc to keep your immune system strong, your skin healthy, and for growth, development and reproductive health
- vitamin B12 for your nervous system
- omega 3 to support heart and brain health.

Getting the right amount of meat and poultry

Advice about how much meat to eat can be confusing – eat enough, but don't eat too much. But how much meat and poultry is enough, and how much is too much?

The [Australian Dietary Guidelines](#) recommend that you eat 1–3 serves of lean meat and poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds, and legumes or beans every day. During pregnancy, 3–4 serves are recommended. And to make sure you get enough iron and zinc, around half these serves should be lean red meat.

A standard serve of meat or poultry is:

- 65 grams cooked lean red meat such as beef, lamb, veal, pork, goat or kangaroo (around 90–100 grams raw)
- 80 grams cooked lean poultry such as chicken or turkey (around 100 grams raw).

But moderation is the key with red meat. The Australian Dietary Guidelines recommend up to 455g cooked lean meat per week, and limiting processed meats (such as ham and bacon) to avoid some of the health risks associated with eating these foods. Many Australian men eat too much red meat and, conversely, Australian women and children tend not to eat enough.

Healthy ways to cook meat and poultry

There are so many tasty ways to cook meat and poultry. Check out these tips:

- Choose a lean cut of meat or poultry. A trimmed pork chop, a lean rump steak or a chicken breast without skin or crumbs on the outside are a great place to start.
- Grill your meat, rather than frying it. And don't add extra oil when you are cooking.
- Use a low-fat marinade to give your meat and poultry a great flavour. Marinades also tenderise your meat and keep it moist during cooking.
- When you are roasting meat or poultry, sit it on a metal rack above the roasting pan so the fat drips off.
- And when you are slow cooking stews, curries and casseroles, try putting less meat or poultry in and adding more vegetables and pulses.

Cooking meat and poultry safely

Cooking your meat and poultry properly kills any bacteria. And this helps protect you and your family from food poisoning.

Safe cooking practices depend on the type of meat or poultry. Some meat and poultry must be cooked all the way through (that is, until the juices run clear and there is no pink or red meat on the inside when you cut it). Cook the following meat and poultry all the way through:

- poultry and game, including chicken, turkey, duck and goose
- pork

- offal (including liver)
- rissoles and sausages
- kebabs
- rolled joints of meat.

But you can eat whole cuts of beef or lamb when they are still pink or rare in the middle (as long as they are cooked on the outside). These include:

- steaks
- cutlets
- roasting cuts.

It can be hard to know how long to cook meat and poultry – it varies depending on the size of the cut, the quality of the meat, and how you like it served (if it's red meat). So rather than concentrate on cooking time, you could monitor temperature. The safe temperatures for different types of meat and poultry are listed below:

Meat type	Safe temperatures
Fish	63°C
Minced meat, sausages	71°C
Beef, veal, lamb, pork medium rare: medium: well done:	63°C – allow at least 3 minutes for the meat to rest 71°C 77°C
Ham fresh (raw): pre-cooked (to reheat):	71°C 60°C
Chicken & turkey whole, thighs, wings, legs, breasts:	74°C
Leftovers	75°C

A good food thermometer is a worthwhile investment. They are not expensive (usually around \$15 and available from most homewares stores) and you will know the exact temperature inside your meat and poultry.

The best ways to store your meat and poultry

[Storing your meat and poultry safely](#) also helps stop bacteria spreading, reducing the risk of food poisoning. Tips for [refrigerating meat and poultry safely](#) include:

- Store unwrapped fresh raw meat in clean containers in the coldest part of your fridge (at 0–3 °C). If the container is ventilated to allow air circulation, you can keep it for up to 5 days (the surface of the meat will dry out a little, but this stops the growth of micro-organisms).
- You can leave meat wrapped in its original packaging (for example, a plastic bag from the butcher or a sealed package from the supermarket), but this keeps moisture trapped, which enables bacteria to grow. Meat refrigerated in its shop packaging should be used within 3 days.
- Before storing fresh chicken pieces in the fridge, remove the plastic wrapping and wash the meat, then dry it with paper towel before storing in a clean container.
- Store raw minced meat in the coldest part of the fridge and use within 3 days.
- Don't eat meat after the use-by date.
- Cool any leftover cooked meat or poultry as quickly as you can (less than one hour), and then put it in your fridge for later.

Freezing meat and poultry is a great way to stay organised. Here are some tips for freezing your meat safely:

- Freeze your meat and poultry before the best before or use by date. The best idea is to put your meat and poultry in the freezer as soon as you get home from shopping. (Over time, the air in the freezer can permeate the plastic, 'burning' the meat or poultry. Meat with freezer burn is still safe to eat, but the freezer burn can affect the taste.)
- If you defrost the meat or poultry in the microwave, cook it straight away. If you want to cook it later, thaw it in the fridge to make sure it doesn't get too warm.
- When defrosting meat or poultry in the fridge, do it in a sealed container. This keeps any juices (which may contain bacteria) away from other foods in your fridge.

- And remember, if you defrost meat and then cook it, you can freeze it again. But don't reheat meat or poultry more than once. This increases the risk of food poisoning.

Feel good about shopping for meat and poultry

Producing meat and poultry uses a lot of energy, water and chemicals (especially compared with fruit, vegetables and grains). Did you know a 150 gram serve of meat can take over 200 litres of water to produce and create 5 kilograms of greenhouse gases?

But there are things you can do to help meat and poultry production be more sustainable and ethical.

- You could reduce your weekly meat or poultry intake each week by one portion. You'll still get the good things your body needs but also reduce the cost of this food on the environment.
- Buying organic meat and poultry may reduce the amount of environmental damage done by synthetic chemicals (like petro-chemical based fertilisers and pesticides).
- Check where your meat and poultry has come from. Reducing your food miles is good for you and the environment.
- And try to buy free-range meat and poultry if possible. Free-range means open pasture grazing for animals (rather than small indoor sheds or cages).

So when you are shopping, try to buy local, in season, higher welfare and less processed meat and poultry. This is best for you, your family and dinner guests, the animals involved and the environment.

Remember...

- Meat and poultry are a great source of protein and lots of other nutrients your body needs.
- Check your recommended intake of meat and poultry and try to stick with it.
- Meat and poultry must be stored and cooked safely.
- There are lots of ways you can shop for meat and poultry sustainably and ethically.

References

- [Lean meat and poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds and legumes/beans](#), 2017, National Health and Medical Research Council, Department of Health, Australian Government.
- [Eat for health Australian dietary guidelines](#), 2013, National Health and Medical Research Council, Department of Health and Ageing, Australian Government.

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[You can minimise the risk of food poisoning by taking simple precautions...](#)

- [Food safety and storage](#)

[High-risk food should be kept at 5 °C or below, and above 60 °C to avoid the temperature danger zone and food poisoning...](#)

- [Food safety - eggs](#)

[To enjoy eggs safely - buy clean, keep cool and cook well...](#)

- [Food safety for summer celebrations \(video\)](#)

[In the hot weather there is a higher risk of food poisoning but if you follow some simple rules when you prepare, handle and store food it will significantly reduce your risk of getting sick...](#)

- [Food safety outdoors](#)

[Food poisoning is a real risk when taking food outside the home, especially in warmer weather...](#)

- [Food safety when cooking](#)

[Most foods should be cooked to at least 75 °C to minimise the risk of food poisoning...](#)

- [Food safety when eating out](#)

[If you have any doubt about the safety of food when you're out, don't eat it...](#)

- [Food safety when shopping](#)

[When you shop, choose, pack and transport food carefully...](#)

- [Food Standards Australia New Zealand \(FSANZ\)](#)

[FSANZ's role is to protect the health and safety of people in Australia and New Zealand by maintaining a safe food supply...](#)

- [Food – use-by and best-before dates](#)

[Check the 'use-by' or 'best before' date when you buy food...](#)

Dieting and diets

- [10 tips on how to eat more calcium](#)

[Reduce your intake of coffee, alcohol and soft drinks... 10 tips on how to eat more calcium...](#)

- [Body image and diets](#)

[Some people diet because they have a poor body image, not because they want to be a healthy weight...](#)

- [Dairy and dairy alternatives](#)

[Dairy products \(and dairy alternatives\) are packed with calcium, protein and lots of other essential nutrients. Calcium is vital for healthy teeth and bones. It is also](#)

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- [Food allergy and intolerance](#)

[Food allergy is an immune response, while food intolerance is a chemical reaction...](#)

- [Food for sport - tucker talk tips](#)

[Carbohydrate is the most important nutrient for athletes...](#)

- [Getting enough protein](#)

[Protein is an important nutrient that helps your body grow and repair cells. Most Australians eat more than enough protein, but if you are vegetarian or vegan you may not be getting enough protein \(or...](#)

- [Gluten-free diet](#)

[Gluten sensitivity can be managed with a gluten-free diet...](#)

- [Heart disease and food](#)

[A diet low in saturated fats and high in fibre and plant foods can substantially reduce your risk of developing heart disease...](#)

- [How to cut down on salt \(slideshow\)](#)

[Even if you are careful about the salt you consume, you may be surprised that some of the food you eat contains hidden salt that you're not even aware of. \[Learn how to cut down on salt...\]\(#\)](#)

- [Mood and food](#)

[Your mood can affect your food choices, and your food choices may affect your mood...](#)

- [Simple ways to cut down on fat \(slideshow\)](#)

[Cutting down on fat is not as hard as you think. Here's how to maintain a healthy weight by consuming the right amount and types of fat...](#)

- [Sporting performance and food](#)

[Good nutrition and a healthy diet are essential to improving your sports performance...](#)

- [Tips to keep our snacks on track \(slideshow\)](#)

[Most of us are prone to the odd snack or two. Check out these simple tips to keep your snacks on track...](#)

- [Vegetarian and vegan eating](#)

[A well-planned vegetarian or vegan diet can meet nutritional needs during all stages of life...](#)

- [Vegetarian diets and children](#)

[Children can eat a vegetarian diet and stay healthy as long as their extra nutritional needs are met...](#)

- [Weight loss and fad diets](#)

[With a balanced eating plan, it's what you leave in that makes all the difference...](#)

- [Weight management services](#)

[Always consult with your doctor before choosing any weight management service...](#)

- [Women's nutrition for life](#)

['Nutrition for life' identifies a woman's four main life stages and how to eat healthily for each of them. Following this information can lead to better health at any stage of your life...](#)

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[Childcare centres should provide healthy meals for your children...](#)

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- [Disability - managing underweight](#)

[There are a number of ways that a person with a disability can successfully avoid unwanted weight loss...](#)

- [Eating tips for babies](#)

[First foods for babies can be prepared easily and cheaply at home without salt, seasonings and sweeteners...](#)

- [Eating tips for children \(3\) - older toddlers](#)

[Offer children the same foods as the family, with a variety of textures and flavours for balanced nutrition...](#)

- [Eating tips for preschoolers](#)

[Children are able to decide how much food they need for activity and growth if allowed to eat according to their appetite...](#)

- [Eating tips for school children](#)

[Snacks are an important part of a healthy diet for active children, so offer nutritious as well as high energy snacks...](#)

- [Eating tips for young toddlers](#)

[Children have a natural ability to sense when they are hungry and when they are full...](#)

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- [Food and your life stages](#)

[The nutritional requirements of the human body change as we move through different life stages...](#)

- [Food for babies - tucker talk tips](#)

[Before six months, breastmilk or formula is the only food and drink that your baby needs...](#)

- [Getting enough protein](#)

[Protein is an important nutrient that helps your body grow and repair cells. Most Australians eat more than enough protein, but if you are vegetarian or vegan you may not be getting enough protein \(or...](#)

- [Good food for Elders - tucker talk tips](#)

[Good nutrition, a healthy diet and physical activity can help Elders prevent or manage health problems...](#)

- [Healthy active Koori kids - tucker talk tips](#)

[Good nutrition and physical exercise help to keep Koori kids healthy and avoid diseases when they get older...](#)

- [Healthy budget - tucker talk tips](#)

[You can buy more food if you spend most of your money on basic healthy foods like bread, cereals, fruit and vegies...](#)

- [Healthy eating during pregnancy - tucker talk tips](#)

[Some foods should be avoided during pregnancy as they carry bacteria that could harm your unborn baby...](#)

- [Healthy eating for adolescent girls](#)

[Eating healthy food is important at any age, but it's especially important for teenagers...](#)

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[As you get older you need fewer calories, but your need for other nutrients remains unchanged. Healthy...](#)

- [Healthy eating for women in their later years](#)

[Being well nourished improves women's mental and physical health and quality of life at all life stages...](#)

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[Good nutrition is especially important during this stage of your life when there is so much happening: independent living, career development, travel, establishing relationships, babies and families...](#)

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