Meat and poultry

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meat type</th>
<th>Safe temperatures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fish</td>
<td>63°C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minced meat, sausages</td>
<td>71°C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beef, veal, lamb, pork</td>
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<tr>
<td>medium rare:</td>
<td>63°C – allow at least 3 minutes for the meat to rest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>medium:</td>
<td>71°C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>well done:</td>
<td>77°C</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ham</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fresh (raw):</td>
<td>71°C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pre-cooked (to reheat):</td>
<td>60°C</td>
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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.

**This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:**
Dietitians Association of Australia