

Healthier Meat Choices

Shop smarter by following these basic guidelines

Meat can be part of a healthful diet, but it pays to be picky about what's on your plate. "In general, choosing animals that are raised outdoors, eating pasture and foraging, and without chemicals, is always best," says Maya Shetreat-Klein, MD, an integrative pediatric neurologist and founder of Mindful Meat and Mitzvah Meat. Start by looking for the USDA organic label, which means animals are raised without pesticides, hormones, antibiotics, or GMO feed. Next, look for "100% grass-fed" or "grass-fed and finished" meats, which have more omega-3s, other antioxidants including vitamin E, conjugated linoleic acid, and lower fat content. In addition, seek out heritage breeds (such as Devon cattle or Hereford pigs), which are not used for industrial production and help to promote genetic diversity. You may find meat that fits these criteria at natural-food stores.

But labels don't always tell the whole story. Many farmers cannot afford organic certification even if they raise their animals naturally. Also, "free-range" or "cage-free" does not guarantee that animals are raised outdoors. Ask your meat department or butcher about the farmers they work with and the animals' living conditions. Or go to a local farmers' market (find one at localbarvest.org) and ask the farmer how the animals were raised.

PRIME CHOICES

Here's a nutritional breakdown of three-ounce portions of several meats, from fattest to leanest.

Ground Beef Even 75 percent lean ground beef is loaded in fat and calories. *249 calories, 21 grams fat (8 g saturated)*

Lamb Trimming visible fat makes it leaner. "It's very difficult to raise lamb organically because they need a lot of land," says Nora Pouillon, chef-owner of the certified-organic Restaurant Nora in Washington, DC. *218 calories, 14 grams fat (6.7 g saturated)*



Grass-fed ground beef "Grass-fed is leaner and tougher, but it has more flavor," says Pouillon. *162 calories, 12 grams fat (3 g saturated)*

Pork (loin and shoulder) Leaner than it used to be, pork still has a lot of outer fat, which should be trimmed. *179 calories, 8 g fat (2.8 g saturated)*

Venison While game meats are lean choices, you know less about wild animals' food sources and environment. Contact state wildlife officials to learn about potential concerns. *134 calories, 3 grams fat (1 g saturated)*

Turkey (light meat) Opt for heritage turkeys, which are more readily available around Thanksgiving and other holidays. *133 calories, 3 grams fat (0.9 g saturated)*

Chicken Breast Choose skinless varieties. *140 calories, 3 grams fat (0.9 g saturated)*

Buffalo (bison) Find at natural-food stores. *122 calories, 2 grams fat (0.8 g saturated)*

THE BOTTOM LINE

Eat all meat in moderation and avoid grilling, frying, or broiling since high heat can cause potentially cancer-promoting chemicals (such as heterocyclic amines, or HCAs) to form. If you do grill, choose lean cuts and don't char the meat. Using marinades with antioxidant-rich herbs and spices also greatly decreases HCAs. Lean meats yield the best results with slow, moist cooking methods, such as braising, roasting or using a slow cooker.

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This monthly column on nutrition is produced in collaboration with the Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine. For more information, visit its website at integrativemedicine.arizona.edu.