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A sausage a day is too many

Anyone who eats over 40 grams a day of sausage products or other kinds of processed meat is asking for trouble: the risk of mortality increases by 18 percent for every 50 grams of processed meat per day. This is the result of a study conducted with around 450,000 participants by the Institute of Social and Preventive Medicine at the University of Zurich in collaboration with research colleagues from all over Europe.

“We estimate that three percent of all premature deaths can be attributed to the high consumption of processed meat,” summarizes Sabine Rohrmann from the Institute of Social and Preventive Medicine at the University of Zurich. Teaming up with research colleagues from ten countries, she has been studying the link between the consumption of processed meat and the risk of mortality as part of a Europe-wide study with around 450,000 participants.

People who eat a lot of processed meat such as sausage products, salami or ham run a higher risk of dying from cardiovascular disease or cancer. The problem is that carcinogenic substances such as nitrosamines form through salting, pickling or smoking, and these might be the cause of the increase in cancer mortality. However, processed meats are also rich in cholesterol and saturated fats, which are linked to an increased risk of cardiovascular disease.

Consumption of processed meat one factor among many, but an important one

Other lifestyle and dietary factors influence the link between the consumption of processed meat and the risk of illness or mortality: for instance, vegetarians often live more healthily than non-vegetarians, do more sport and are less likely to smoke. This also goes for the present study: The participants who eat the most processed meat also eat fewer fruit and vegetables, consume more alcohol and smoke more. But even taking these factors into account in the evaluation of the data, the core result of the study still proves to be true: People who eat over 40 grams of processed meat per day have an increased risk of mortality compared to those who eat fewer than 20 grams a day.

Pain threshold 40 grams a day

However, meat also is a key source of important vitamins, especially B vitamins, and minerals such as iron: “Therefore, the moderate consumption of up to 40 grams a day doesn’t increase the mortality risk,” says first author Rohrmann, summing up the good news from the study.

Literature:

Sabine Rohrmann, et al. Meat consumption and mortality – results from the European Prospective Investigation into Cancer and Nutrition. BMC Medicine. March 2013.

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Please send queries by email on March 7, 2013. Professor Rohrmann will call you back as soon as possible.

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