



## 'EAT LESS' CAMPAIGNS TARGETING THE WRONG MEAT CONSUMERS

### ***Fear of increased risk of iron deficiency***

Women moving away from red meat are putting their health at risk, says a government report looking at the nation's diet.

The latest release from the National Diet and Nutrition Survey (NDNS)<sup>1</sup>, the government's 'bible' of eating habits in the UK, has revealed a significant drop in women's red meat consumption from 58 grams a day in 2008-10 to just 47 grams today. Men, in contrast, have not changed their meat eating habits at all.

Red meat is vital for a healthy, balanced diet as it is an important contributor of iron, zinc, selenium, iodine, vitamin D, B vitamins and protein. These are nutrients which are often lacking in the diets of some population groups, particularly teenagers, young children, women and elderly people<sup>2</sup>. In particular, the iron in red meat is three times better absorbed than the iron in plant foods, such as spinach.

Overall, adults now eat 65 grams of red and processed meat daily on average, well within the recommended maximum of 70 grams advocated by the government in 2010.

Dr Carrie Ruxton, a dietitian on the **Meat Advisory Panel (MAP)**, comments: "We are now bombarded with messages to cut red meat consumption, through meat-free days, weeks or months. I fear this is rubbing off on the most vulnerable groups – women and teenage girls – not the high meat consumers who are typically male.

"The new NDNS data shows a disturbing drop in the amount of red meat eaten by women, with teenage girls remaining static at a low level of meat consumption which matches that eaten by 4-10 year

old boys. The average woman now eats the equivalent of just over two rashers of bacon a day while men eat the equivalent of nearly four rashers daily.

"As expected, this is having a major consequence on women and girl's iron intakes and risk of deficiency. The NDNS shows that almost half of girls aged 11-18 years and 17% of women have iron intakes which fall below the minimum<sup>3</sup> recommended for health.

"In addition, 5% of girls and 3% of women have a combination of low haemoglobin and low ferritin which indicates an increased risk of iron deficiency anaemia. Indeed, Public Health England, which authored the report, noted that: '*There is continued evidence of anaemia (as indicated by low haemoglobin levels) and of low iron stores (as indicated by low plasma ferritin), especially among females aged 11 to 18 years and women aged 19 to 64 years*'.

"A blanket approach to red meat reduction, favoured by the Eatwell Plate and some charities, could be having a negative impact on the diets and health of women and girls. Bluntly, men need to eat a little less red meat but women should eat more."

**MAP FACT:** Iron deficiency can cause anaemia, concave and brittle nails, sore tongues, cracking in the corners of the mouth, increased susceptibility to infection. Also, tiredness, muscle fatigue, skin itching, dizziness, headache, insomnia, brittle hair and hair loss.

**-ENDS-**

The Meat Advisory Panel (MAP) is a group of experts who provide independent and objective information about red meat and its role as part of a healthy, balanced diet.

**For more information** about the role of red meat in the diet, visit [www.meatmatters.com](http://www.meatmatters.com) or please contact:

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<sup>1</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/statistics/ndns-results-from-years-5-and-6-combined](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/ndns-results-from-years-5-and-6-combined)

<sup>2</sup> Bates B et al (2014) National Diet and Nutrition Survey: rolling programme years 1-4.

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-diet-and-nutrition-survey-results-from-years-1-to-4-combined-of-the-rolling-programme-for-2008-and-2009-to-2011-and-2012](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-diet-and-nutrition-survey-results-from-years-1-to-4-combined-of-the-rolling-programme-for-2008-and-2009-to-2011-and-2012)

[nutrition-survey-results-from-years-1-to-4-combined-of-the-rolling-programme-for-2008-and-2009-to-2011-and-2012](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-diet-and-nutrition-survey-results-from-years-1-to-4-combined-of-the-rolling-programme-for-2008-and-2009-to-2011-and-2012)

<sup>3</sup> Lower Reference Nutrient Intake