

Meat as Human Food

Written by W.J.Pais

Wednesday, 21 January 2015 00:00 - Last Updated Wednesday, 21 January 2015 14:18

We claim that this is the 21st Century, but our tastes sometimes are set by clocks, which have been handed down from one generation to another. In a country where the majority of the population is Vegetarian, this topic may be a bit jarring on their nerves. However, as sensible humans, we should know why this particular attachment to meat has been existing in various groups of humans that have existed on this planet now for so many centuries, and have evolved cuisines - Perhaps, we should at least try and learn the point of view of all.

Meat is animal flesh that is eaten as food. Generally, this means the skeletal muscle and associated fat and other tissues, but it may also describe other edible tissues such as offal. Meat is used in a more restrictive sense—the flesh of mammalian species (pigs, cattle, lambs, etc.) raised and prepared for human consumption, to the exclusion of fish and other seafood, poultry, and other animals. Game or bush meat is also generally distinguished from that produced by agriculture.

The composition of the diet, especially the amount of protein provided, is also an important factor regulating animal growth. Producing high-quality protein animal feed is expensive. Growth hormones, particularly anabolic agents such as steroids, are used in some countries to accelerate muscle growth in animals.

Adult mammalian muscle flesh consists of roughly 75 percent water, 19 percent protein, 2.5 percent intramuscular fat, 1.2 percent carbohydrates and 2.3 percent other soluble non-protein substances.

Meat can be broadly classified as “red” or “white” depending on the concentration of myoglobin in muscle fibre. When myoglobin is exposed to oxygen, reddish oxymyoglobin develops, making myoglobin-rich meat appear red. The redness of meat depends on species, animal age, and fibre type: Red meat contains more narrow muscle fibres that tend to operate over long periods without rest, while white meat contains more broad fibres that tend to work in short fast bursts. The meat of adult mammals such as cows, sheep, goats, and horses is generally considered red, while domestic chicken and turkey breast meat is generally considered white.

All muscle tissue is very high in protein, containing all of the essential amino acids, and in most cases is a good source of zinc, vitamin B12, selenium, phosphorus, niacin, vitamin B6, choline, riboflavin and iron.

Muscle tissue is very low in carbohydrates and does not contain dietary fiber. Taken judiciously, red meat, such as beef, pork, and lamb, contains many essential nutrients necessary for healthy growth and development in children. Nutrients in red meat include iron, zinc, vitamin B12, and protein.

Fresh meat can be cooked for immediate consumption, or be processed, that is, treated for

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longer-term preservation and later consumption, possibly after further preparation. A common additive to processed meats, both for preservation and because it prevents discoloring, is sodium nitrite, which, however, is also a source of health concerns, because it may form carcinogenic nitrosamines when heated.

Reasons for objecting to the practice of killing animals for consumption may include animal rights, environmental ethics, religious doctrine, or an aversion to inflicting pain or harm on other sentient creatures.

In recent years, health concerns have been raised about the consumption of meat increasing the risk of cancer. This is because of the modern way of meat preservation, and as said, immediate consumption of meat from live stock, is less risky. This is also the reason, that in the past, for centuries, there were no complaints, and people lived to ripe old age, even after regularly being meat eaters, and died at a ripe old age. Unfortunately, it is the modern life style and its demands are the main culprit.

In response to changing prices as well as health concerns about saturated fat and cholesterol, consumers have altered their consumption of various meats.

Meat can transmit certain diseases, but complete cooking and avoiding recontamination reduces this possibility. Hence once the meat is defrosted, it should be cooked completely, and not refrigerated again. This leads to contamination. Nitrosamines, present in processed and cooked foods, have been noted as being carcinogenic, being linked to colon cancer. Also, toxic compounds called PAHs, or polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, present in processed, smoked and cooked foods, are known to be carcinogenic.