
12 MYTHS ABOUT BEEF

A Dozen of the Most Popular Misconceptions About America's Most Popular Meat

In recent years America's long-time "King of Meats" has been taking a beating. For reasons not understood by cattlemen, beef suddenly has become the whipping boy for food faddists, diet book authors—and even some scientists and nutritionists.

Is there a reason to be alarmed about beef? Are we putting our lives at stake when we sit down to a succulent T-bone? Do we risk cancer, heart attack or worse when we sink our teeth into that juicy hamburger? And the most important question of all: Can a food taste that good—and still be bad for you?

It seems that the MYTHS about beef have no trouble at all being picked up in print by the tabloids located near the supermarket check-out counters. But what are the FACTS about beef?

To show that FACTS often are as interesting as MYTHS, the following presents documented truths about beef—how it reaches your table and what it does and doesn't do for and to your body.

1 MYTH: Beef is high in cholesterol.

FACT: Three ounces of cooked lean beef contain 73 milligrams of cholesterol. By comparison, the same amount of roast chicken contains 76 mg; fried chicken, 74 mg; pork, 77 mg; shrimp, 130 mg; cheddar cheese, 90 mg. Of course, the human body NEEDS cholesterol—some 1,000 milligrams a day—and the body normally will manufacture the difference between the amount consumed and the amount it requires. The standard three-ounce serving of beef provides

only about 8 percent of the cholesterol the body needs.

2 MYTH: Beef is high in calories.

FACT: Three ounces of lean roast beef contain 169 calories; three ounces of top loin (strip) steak contain 195 calories. Three ounces of baked chicken, without skin, contain 174 calories while three ounces of fried chicken, with skin, contain 209 calories. Actually, beef is ideal for modern, low-calorie diets because today's leaner cattle provide beef that is, on the average, 10 percent lower in calories than it was in years past.

3 MYTH: Beef is hard to digest.

FACT: Beef is highly digestible—more digestible, in fact, than vegetables. Beef's ingredients are 96 percent digested, and its abundant nutrients are almost completely absorbed and used by the body.

4 MYTH: Beef is high in saturated fat.

FACT: Beef actually contains considerably less fat than is generally assumed. Three ounces of cooked lean beef contain about nine grams of fat—and less than half of that is saturated. Of all the fat in the U.S. food supply, 36 percent comes from meat and fish. The increase in fat intake in this country has been caused primarily by an increase in use of vegetable fats. Fats and oils now account for 43 percent of the fat in the food supply.

5 MYTH: Beef contributes to cancer.

FACT: To date, reported links between diet and cancer have been mostly hypothetical. A group of scientists convened by the American Cancer Society concluded that no single dietary factor, including fat or meat, could possibly account for more than a small fraction of cancer in the

United States. In any event, the issue is fat, of all types, and not meat per se. If a person accepts the theory that a low fat diet will help prevent cancer, beef should probably be in that person's diet, because modern beef is lower in fat and calories and high in protein, vitamins and minerals.

6 MYTH: Beef is frequently processed under unsanitary conditions.

FACT: The meat industry is the most regulated of all food industries. It has been described as the most regulated industry in the nation, with the exception of the nuclear energy industry. Physical inspections of meat are made in packing plants by certified inspectors from the state or the U.S. Department of Agriculture. When a violation is uncovered, it results in substantial news coverage—because it is a rare and truly unusual event.

7 MYTH: Beef's nutritional makeup is no better or worse than that of other meats.

FACT: Beef actually contains substantially larger amounts of certain vital nutrients. Beef contains nine times as much Vitamin B-12 ounce for ounce as chicken, about two and a half times as much iron and four times as much zinc. (Iron and zinc are the two most common nutritional deficiencies in America today.) Beef is what nutritionists call a "nutrient-dense" food. It supplies a large share of essential nutrients and a relatively small share of calories. For example, a three-ounce serving of lean beef supplies only 8 percent of an adult's daily calorie requirements—but 45 percent of the daily protein requirement.

8 MYTH: Diets recommended by health organizations should not include beef.

FACT: New research on the nutritional composition of beef and on amounts of meat actually consumed by Americans show that beef can be used regularly by almost any consumer who is concerned about diet and

health. It is now known that red meat supplies calories, fat, saturated fat and cholesterol in amounts far below the limits recommended by many scientific and health organizations. Consumers who want to cut down on calories and fat and cholesterol can do so without cutting down on the amount of beef they consume.

9 MYTH:

Beef provides iron with the same nutritional value as the iron in vegetables.

FACT: A three-ounce serving of beef supplies 26 percent of the recommended daily allowance of iron for an adult male. And the iron provided by beef is "heme iron," a type that is three to five times more easily absorbed by the body than the iron found in other foods. It also has a booster effect on iron in other foods consumed at the same time. Much of the iron in spinach, for instance, is not made available to the body unless it is eaten in combination with another food. Beef provides iron—and also

serves as a catalyst to help you get the most iron out of other foods.

10 MYTH:

Beef cattle production uses grain that could be used to feed the world's hungry.

FACT: The grain fed to livestock is mostly "feed" grain, for which there is little or no demand as human food. Grain—either food grain or feed grain—will not be produced unless there is a market for it. The livestock industry provides that market. Actually, the grain fed to beef cattle represents only 15 percent of the total feed for cattle.

11 MYTH:

Beef cattle graze on valuable land that could be used for the production of crops for humans.

FACT: About one billion acres of the nation's 2.2 billion acres of land

are used for pasture and grazing. The vast majority of this land is too rugged, too arid, too wet or too high to cultivate crops of any kind. If it were not for grazing ruminant (four-stomach) animals like cattle, this one billion acres of land would have no productive use. Cattle are able to convert otherwise unusable cellulose in grass and shrubs into nutritious beef.

12 MYTH:

Americans eat too much beef.

FACT: Americans consume an average of two ounces of cooked beef per day—considerably less than the recommended daily intake of foods from the meat group. When you consider the superior nutritional value of beef and its genuine good taste, is it any wonder that it continues to be an American favorite both at home and when dining out? **AJ**

Reprinted with permission from the National Cattlemen's Association.