

## Choosing Skinny Meats

We are all aware of what the risk factors for cardiovascular disease are and that a poor diet is one of them! So should you become a vegetarian because meat is supposedly not associated with good heart health? The answer to that is no. Meats can be included as part of a balanced eating plan with emphasis on portion control and leaner cuts of meat. Proteins are an important macronutrient required daily by the body - with requirements varying from one individual to another. Important sources of these include meats, poultry, fish, legumes, eggs and nuts. Apart from the valuable protein, iron, vitamin B12 and zinc content of meat, it also contains saturated fat - the main fat that is responsible for raising cholesterol levels, affecting heart health negatively. Therefore moderation is the key to attaining a good cardiovascular profile!

### Lamb, Beef and Pork

Lamb, beef and pork all have a high fat content when the visible fat remains on the meat. Therefore wherever possible, the visible fat must be trimmed off and the meat should be cooked in as little or no fat if possible. It is suitable to consume lean meats no more than 2-3 times a week. On other days, try dishes made from legumes, lentils, soya, ostrich, fish or lean poultry.

### Which are The Leaner Cuts?

#### Venison

- The common cuts include flank, haunch, neck, saddle (loin), shank and shoulder
- The leanest cuts are the leg, blade steak, rib roast, shoulder steak, and loin chop (excess fat trimmed off)

#### Ostrich

- Classified as a red meat but with a much lower fat content compared to lamb, beef or pork
- The prime cuts that are commonly available are mince, steaks, fillet and neck
- Bear in mind that this type of meat should not be cooked for long periods as they tend to become tough due to the low fat content

#### Pork

- The tenderloin is the leanest cut of pork
- Other lean cuts include *boneless* loin roast, sirloin chops, loin chops or ham-limit intake if watching salt
- Remember to ask for lean pork mince

#### Beef

- Look out for rump, fillet, sirloin, topside (trimmed of excess fat) as these are the leaner options
- Choose extra lean mince

#### Lamb

- The 5 primal cuts include the shoulder, breast/foreshank, rib, loin/flank and leg - the foreshank being the leanest cut
- The loin cut is leaner compared to the rib cut
- Remove all visible fat prior to cooking

### Healthy Tips for Red Meats

- Trim all visible fat of any meat prior to cooking
- Use minimal amounts of fat or none if possible - rather use a cooking spray to prevent sticking
- If needed, choose a low fat sauce to accompany the meal
- Use lower fat cooking methods like grilling, steaming, roasting or braaing
- Limit deep and shallow frying as these add unwanted calories
- Use liquids such as fruit juices, wine or low sodium meat or vegetable stock to vary the taste of the dish
- Use plenty of herbs and spices to add flavour instead of salt
- Control portion size
- Leave stews to cool after cooking-then remove the excess fat that accumulates on top
- Opt for ostrich or game biltong if you are looking for a lean snack

Knowing that 80% of heart disease is preventable, it is advisable to follow an overall heart-healthy lifestyle that includes a balanced diet that is lower in saturated fat, salt and sugar, and higher in fibre and good fats (mono and polyunsaturated fats). This should be coupled with regular physical activity as well as addressing other risk factors such as smoking, overweight, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, diabetes, stress and excessive alcohol intake.

***For more heart smart information or advice from registered dieticians, call the Heart Mark Diet Line on 0860 223 222.***

**Written by Ayesha Seedat, Registered Dietician, The Heart and Stroke Foundation SA.**