Resources

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The Power of Pork

During stages of life when growth and development needs are high, such as during childhood, adolescence and pregnancy, eating animal-based foods such as pork provides a greater quantity and quality of protein than that found in plant foods.

Beyond these key times, getting enough protein is important for adults, too. A growing body of research shows that eating a moderate amount of protein, combined with physical activity, is key to maintaining lean muscle mass while optimizing nutritional needs at this stage of life.

A 3-oz. portion of pork tenderloin, for example, is an excellent source of protein, thiamin, vitamin B6, phosphorus and niacin, and a good source of potassium, riboflavin and zinc, yet contributes only 6% of calories to a 2,000-calorie diet.[1]

Getting proper education and behavioral support from trusted registered dietitians about the dietary pattern options that are in line with dietary guidance will help ensure Americans of ALL ages eat a diet high in nutrients, but relatively low in calories.

The Other White Meat®

Research Shows the Power of Pork:

INFANTS: Research on infants shows an advantage in growth, especially in length, with meat-based complementary foods for both formula-fed and breast-fed infants. Sixty-four healthy formula-fed infants were randomly assigned to receive either meat-based complementary foods, such as pureed ham or beef, or dairy-based complementary foods. The meat-based complementary foods promoted linear growth when compared with approximately the same quantity of dairy-based complementary foods. There was an increase in overweight risk with a significant increase in the weight for length in the dairy group as compared with the meat group.[2] Rate of weight gain in early infancy has been linked to obesity trajectory carried through childhood and adulthood, making it important to consider types of complementary foods that promote growth without also promoting excess adiposity.

ADOLESCENTS: A 12-week study of overweight breakfast-skipping adolescents revealed the daily addition of a high-protein breakfast, including pork, prevented body fat gain when compared with skipping breakfast when a low-protein breakfast did not. The prevention of body fat gain occurred with reductions in daily hunger and voluntary reductions in daily intake.[3] Adolescents can be undernourished in key nutrients, the consumption of lean, nutrient-rich animal proteins such as pork can help fulfill nutrient needs while also helping to limit the amount of calories eaten.

ADULTHOOD: Protein has been linked to positive outcomes for diabetes, cardiovascular disease and functional benefits.

- **Diabetes:** Lower-carbohydrate diets have been shown to be beneficial for treatment of Type 2 diabetes. Research has shown intake of a higher-protein, lean pork-containing breakfast may favorably influence appetite and lower postprandial glucose, insulin and triglyceride values in overweight or obese adults with prediabetes.[4]

- **Cardiovascular Disease:** Lean meats, including pork, can also be part of a nutritionally balanced diet that does not increase the risk of heart disease. In fact, higher protein intakes have been found to have positive effects on reducing risk factors for heart disease, including improving blood lipid profiles and reducing blood pressure.[5,6] In looking at the DASH diet, research has shown it can be expanded beyond chicken and fish in the traditional pattern to include lean pork for the same positive health outcomes.[7] Similarly, when adults ate higher amounts of lean red meat within the USDA's Healthy Mediterranean-Style Eating pattern, they experienced similar positive impacts on cardiovascular disease risk factors.[8]

- **Functional Benefits:** Specific research on sarcopenia suggests the benefits of higher-protein diets extend beyond muscle mass preservation, also helping to prevent functional decline. The POWR-UP trial found participants on "higher" protein weight-loss diets experienced significant improvements in key physical function measures, such as walking farther and functional movement, at four months compared to a "normal" protein weight-loss diet, and both groups experienced improvements in these measures at six months.[9]