

# *Role of Convenient Meat in Healthy Eating and Active Lifestyles*

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The focus of this presentation is to share current facts and build awareness of the role of convenient meat in healthy, active lifestyles. This is an important takeaway because the reality is the majority of people eat convenient meat products, and convenient meat products can help consumers meet their personal dietary and lifestyle goals. It's also critically important for the meat industry to advocate for more funding of meat-protein nutrition research to ensure data are available for future dietary recommendations, and convenient meats remain part of healthy eating solutions.

## **THE CURRENT NUTRITION AND POLICY ENVIRONMENT**

Given that the majority of Americans are either overweight or obese, this condition is in the cross-hairs of all population-based prevention policies and is the lens through which all health and wellness recommendations and messages are viewed. The perception of meat and convenient meats by some health influencers, public health communities, and even mainstream media are often focused on the following factors:

- Nutrients of concern such as saturated fat, sodium and cholesterol
- Reducing the intake of meat/convenient meats (e.g., Meatless Mondays)
- Chronic disease risks
- Reducing intake of processed foods in general

Media and social media coverage of nutrition studies continue to perpetuate the negative health perceptions of meat, and often times to create interest in the story research is over-stated and the totality of the evidence is not included. One study can contradict the results of a previ-

ous one, which can cause consumer confusion as well as sensational headlines resulting in undue alarm. There appears to be an opportunity to balance the messages people are receiving about the range of convenient meat choices and the research that shows a neutral or beneficial role of convenient meat on health-related outcomes.

One could argue that education is not enough because there is an obesity epidemic in this country, and only 5% of people are following national dietary recommendations. Some individuals and groups are of the mindset that more needs to be done and a shift is needed to move from education to intervention. Which means food control: labeling...taxing...restricting food to help guide food choices. But will this work? Cities and even countries have tried to impose taxes and restrictions on certain foods and nutrients only to have them invalidated or retracted. So maybe what's needed is to go back to basics – and instead of telling consumers which nutrients and foods they need to eat less of, instead show them how to build healthy meals and diets with a variety of foods.

In the current 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, what was previously known as the Meat Group has become the Protein Foods Group – which takes the focus away from meat at the center of the plate and highlights other protein sources. While there are some recommendations in the Guidelines such as 'eat less meat and processed meat' and 'move closer to a plant-based, less processed diet,' it's important to note that they also state that animal protein including meat is the most efficient way to get the most protein from your calories. Moreover, there are options when it comes to processed or convenient meat (e.g., lean options such as turkey, reduced-fat and reduced-sodium meat varieties, etc.). As an industry there is an opportunity to continue to provide people with choices to help them more easily meet the recommendations while also educating that not all processed meats are created equal.

There also was a heightened interest in dietary protein by the scientific community during the 2010 Dietary Guidelines process, and protein is expected to be a focus in 2015—with the process for the next Dietary Guidelines already underway.

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## THE POWER OF PROTEIN

Protein is an essential nutrient – needed in the diet every day and critical for normal growth, development and function. It also helps maintain muscle mass in adults, and helps build muscle in children. But not all proteins are created equal: animal proteins, meats and convenient meats are complete high-quality proteins that contain all the essential amino acids, or building blocks, the body needs to stay healthy. Plant proteins such as grains, legumes, nuts and seeds are incomplete proteins in that they do not provide sufficient amounts of essential amino acids.

According to the 2013 International Food Information Council Food & Health survey, the main reason people eat protein is to have a balanced diet—followed closely by the desire to gain energy, strength and satiety. But while consumers are interested in consuming more protein, data shows they are still at the low end of intake recommendations. The Institute of Medicine’s Acceptable Macronutrient Distribution Range for protein is 10-35% of calories – and on average, Americans consume about 15% daily. But when intakes go higher—around 20-35% of total calories—science suggests it may result in additional benefits like satiety and improved body composition—which may lead to better overall health.

In addition to a focus on total quantity of protein consumed, research is increasingly exploring the role of timing of protein intake. In the U.S. today, most protein is consumed at dinner time with the least amount consumed at breakfast and snack time. Research suggests there may be an opportunity to maximize protein utilization in muscle by increasing protein consumption and spreading out protein intake evenly throughout the day – at breakfast, lunch, dinner and snack time – up to amounts of 30 grams of high quality protein at a given meal or snack.

## ROLE OF CONVENIENT MEATS IN HEALTHY DIETS

All foods can fit into a balanced diet, and while there really are no good or bad foods, there are good and bad diets. In order to know the difference it’s important to be an educated consumer and build diets with foods from all food groups, be mindful of appropriate portion sizes, and be physically active to help balance calories in and calories out.

Convenient meats have a place in healthy eating. They provide convenience with specific nutrition benefits – such as delivering high quality protein. They come in different varieties to give consumers options to meet their health and wellness needs (e.g., lean, natural, reduced sodium, fat-free, gluten-free, etc.). They taste great and they can fit into healthy dietary patterns that meet Dietary Guidelines food group recommendations. Furthermore, about 95% of Americans choose to include meat as part of their diet, and lean meats are included in many diets that have been shown to promote health, such as the American Heart Association’s Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes diet, the DASH diet and the Mediterranean diet.

Convenient meats come in a wide variety of options and these foods can be found in many different places – in the refrigerator, the freezer, deli counter and even in convenient stores. These products were created to meet the needs of consumers: they offer convenience, they provide specific nutrition benefits and they taste great.

The bottom line: convenient meats CAN play a role and fit into healthy, active lifestyles.