# **Red meat cripples your bowels: Cutting one portion a week could save you from painful abscesses that cost US hospitals $2 BILLION a year**

* **Eating red meat six times a week increased the risk of abscesses by 58 percent**
* **Substituting a chicken or fish dish decreased the chances by 20 percent**
* **Experts suggest unprocessed red meat upsets the bacteria in the stomach**

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Regularly eating red meat could increase your risk of getting a painful bowel disease, scientists have found.

Six meat-heavy meals a week bump up the chances of developing diverticulitis - abscesses in the digestive tract - by 58 percent, the study shows.

The study of US men also found the risk of diverticulitis increases by 18 percent for each day of the week that red meat is eaten - and eating chicken or fish as a substitute reduces the risk.

Swapping just one red meat dinner for chicken or fish reduces the risk by 20 percent.

Experts hope the simple lifestyle change could control the disease, which hospitalizes more than 200,000 Americans every year - at an annual cost of $2 billion.

Diverticulitis occurs when the small pockets or bulges lining the intestine become inflamed or infected and painful abscesses, scarring and fistulas form in the gut.

Lead author Dr Yin Cao, from the Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School, said: 'We identified unprocessed red meat, but not processed red meat, as the major driver for the link between red meat and diverticulitis.

'In contrast, higher consumption of poultry or fish was not linked with risk of incident diverticulitis.

'However, substitution of one serving of unprocessed red meat per day with poultry or fish was associated with a 20 percent lower risk of diverticulitis.'

### **HOW TO SPOT DIVERTICULITIS**

Diverticulitis occurs when small pouches in the wall of the digestive tract become inflamed.

The disease is most common in those over the age of 50.

Doctors are unsure what causes diverticulitis but it's be linked to a low-fiber diet, lack of exercise, smoking and obesity.

Signs and symptoms:

* Constant and persistent pain, usually felt in the lower left side of the abdomen
* Nausea and vomiting
* Fever
* Abdominal tenderness
* Constipation or, less commonly, diarrhea

If the attack is mild, the inflammation can be treated at home with antibiotics or a liquid diet.

If the attack is severe, a tube may be inserted to drain abscesses if one forms or surgery if the bowel is obstructed.

To prevent diverticulitis:

* Exercise more
* Eat a high-fiber diet
* Drink plenty of fluids

According to the American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy, half of all people in the US over age 60, and nearly everyone over age 80, has at least some diverticula in their colon.

However, new cases particularly with young people are on the rise and around four percent of those affected will develop severe or long-term complications.

The causes of diverticulitis are not well-known, but suggestions include a low-fiber diet, lack of exercise, smoking and obesity, according to the researchers.

The study followed the diets of 46,500 men between the ages of 40 and 75 over the course of 26 years to find out more about what causes the disease.

Every four years the men were asked to state how often they had eaten standard size portions of red meat, poultry and fish.

They were given nine options, ranging from 'never' or 'less than once a month,' to 'six or more times a day.'

During the 26-year monitoring period, 764 men - less than two percent - developed diverticulitis.

The researchers found that men who ate unprocessed red meat six times a week had a 58 percent higher risk of developing diverticulitis - even when other risk factors such as smoking and lack of exercise were taken into consideration.

They also discovered that substituting one daily portion of unprocessed red meat with fish or poultry cut the chances of developing bowel disease by 20 percent.

It is not yet understood why eating red meat increases the risk of bowel disease, but researchers suspect that unprocessed red meat could upset the community of bacteria - known as the microbiome - that lives inside the human gut.

Dr Cao said: 'The gut microbiome may also mediate the link between red meat and diverticulitis.

'Emerging evidence suggest that short-term and long-term diet, particularly red meat intake, alters the microbial community structure.'

She added that unprocessed meat may be more harmful than processed meat because people tend to eat larger portions of unprocessed food.

She said: 'Compared with processed meat, unprocessed meat for example steak is usually consumed in larger portions, which could lead to a larger undigested piece in the large bowel and induce different changes in colonic microbiota.

'In addition, higher cooking temperatures used in the preparation of unprocessed meat may influence bacterial composition or pro-inflammatory mediators in the colon.'

Dr Cao added that because the research was only carried out on men, the findings may not apply to women.