

EN_66161690 Research Introduction

Eating meat has been a part of the human diet for ages, reaching far back in our history (Ederer & Leroy, 2023). Today, it being a rich source of nutrients is not the only reason for its consumption, we are socialised into eating it from a young age (Hartmann & Siegrist, 2020). Frequently, meat is not just a way of meeting the needs of the physical body but is also intertwined with culture. In Western societies, this phenomenon can be found in multiple different dimensions, such as in literature and history (Swatland, 2010). However, the relevance lies not only in the past but also in the present, as the total amount of meat consumed continues to rise (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2023). In 2021, meat production reached heights of around 357 million tons and is also expected to rise further in the future (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development of the United Nations, 2021). In conclusion, up until today, meat has held significant importance in human life for a long time, not just as a part of the diet but also culture.

This popularity and increasing consumption stand in contrast to the negative influence meat has on our health, environment and animal welfare. Consuming meat is related to various chronic diseases like cancer and cardiovascular complications (Henchion et al., 2014). Furthermore, meat production and accompanying processes have many serious negative effects on our environment. Among these, animal agriculture is responsible for 14,5% of the global man-made CO₂ emissions (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2017) and is also very water intensive. Meat accounts for a large share of roughly 20,2% of the global water footprint (Hoekstra & Mekonnen, 2012). Lastly, the welfare of animals in animal agriculture is frequently criticized. Animals are regularly affected by pain, which has been a problem for a considerable amount of time. Nevertheless, it remains insufficiently treated, underacknowledged and disregarded. Pigs, highly intelligent beings, are often so bored that they bite each other's tails off. Instead of improving their living conditions, it is a common practice in the industry to cut their tails themselves beforehand. Chickens commonly suffer from "debeaking", a procedure so painful that it alters their behavior for several weeks (Singer, 2023). These negative

aspects highlight the importance of a more sustainable choice of protein and other nutrients, in order to collectively reduce global meat consumption.

Despite the knowledge of the potential negative consequences meat consumption can lead to, many people that are aware of the problem fail to sustainably reduce their meat intake. This is also known as the meat paradox, which describes the inconsistent beliefs of people who, although caring for animals, savor the consumption of meat (Bastian et al., 2012). Festinger (1957) explains that when our beliefs are not in line with our actions, we experience uncomfortable feelings, namely cognitive dissonance. He states that this is because humans tend to pursue internal consistency and experience the need to take action to reduce any inconsistencies.

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