



Is Bacon Really Bad for Your Health?

Putting the WHO cancer report in perspective

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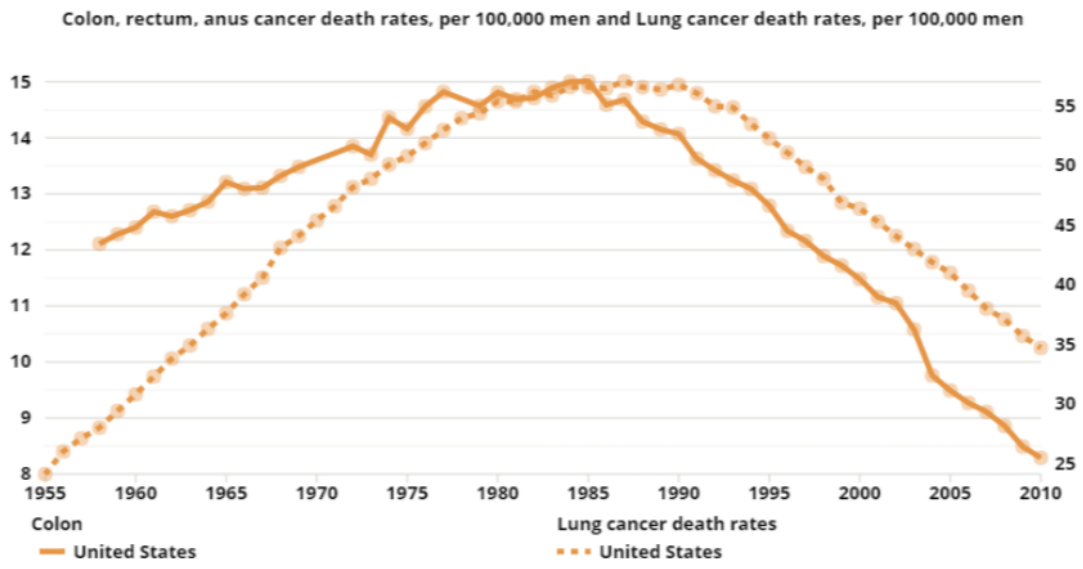
A new World Health Organization (WHO) study has purportedly found that "processed meat ranks alongside smoking as a major cause of cancer."

According to the WHO report, "each 50g of processed meat a day—the equivalent of one sausage, or less than two slices of bacon—increases the chance of developing bowel cancer by 18 percent. Global health experts listed processed meat as a cancer-causing substance—the highest of five possible rankings, shared with alcohol, asbestos, arsenic and cigarettes."

I am sure that, in the coming weeks and months, many scholars will pore over the report and ascertain its robustness.

In the meantime, let's put colon and lung cancers in perspective. Among American men, both reached their peak death rates in the mid-1980s. They have been declining ever since. Between 1985 and 2010, lung and colon cancer death rates declined by 39 percent and 54 percent respectively. Among American women, lung cancer peaked in 1998 and colon cancer in 1961. Between their peaks and 2010, the two cancers' death rates declined by 15 percent and 53 percent respectively.

Moderation in the consumption of bacon and sausages is probably a good thing, but let's not put the U.S. bacon industry out of business by indulging in America's favorite past time—overreaction.



Source: International Agency for Research on Cancer

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