



Have You Heard?

By Doris Thomas
Lancaster Extension
Home Economist

SHOULD YOU GIVE UP RED MEAT?

You have all heard the news: Our diets contain too much fat, and we should cut back on fats and increase the amounts of fruits and vegetables and whole grains in our diets. Some people have asked me if they should give up red meat altogether.

In the days of nutritional ignorance, a meal was not considered a meal unless it consisted of a large piece of meat, potato and a token vegetable or two. This era of eat-

ing huge portions of meat, especially when it is heavily marbled and rimmed with a thick layer of fat, is gone. The saturated fat found in meat can clog arteries and cause serious damage to the cardiovascular system.

Many people have learned to enjoy pasta and other carbohydrate-based dishes and have gained control of their craving for meat at every meal for the sake of their health. In prehistoric times when humans began eating meat, the animals they consumed

were far leaner than today's well-fed animals. Also, since game was hard to come by and had to be divided among members of the cave-dwelling families, portions were no doubt smaller. And, life back then was not sedentary. The human body was really not designed to drive to the store, buy a supply of meat, drive home, prepare it, eat it and then relax and watch TV for several hours and then go to bed. That's far different from prehistoric man having to chase after his food and expending calories in the process.

Many people today have a weight problem, as well as high cholesterol, and eating less red meat is one way of cutting back on calories and fat. Switching to chicken and fish, which are leaner, is a sensible trend for everybody.

But does this mean that we should give up red meat, and ban it from our lives? The answer is NO. Giving up red meat will not guarantee that your diet is balanced and healthful. No one

single dietary measure is likely to cause a 180-degree turn around to your health, and simply giving up red meat will not mean that you do not have to worry about having too much fat and cholesterol in your diet.

A nutritious and healthy diet depends less on what you give up than on what you substitute in its place. For example, you go out to eat and you would love to order steak, but not wanting to consume all that fat and cholesterol, you order a pasta dish (one's that loaded with cream and cheeses). You may feel virtuous, but your fat and calorie intake will still be very high.

What you order when you go out to eat is not that important, unless you eat out frequently. What does matter is what you eat on a day-to-day basis. Do you spread your bread with a lot of butter? Do you feast on chips and French fries? Do you use a lot of oil when you cook, and prepare

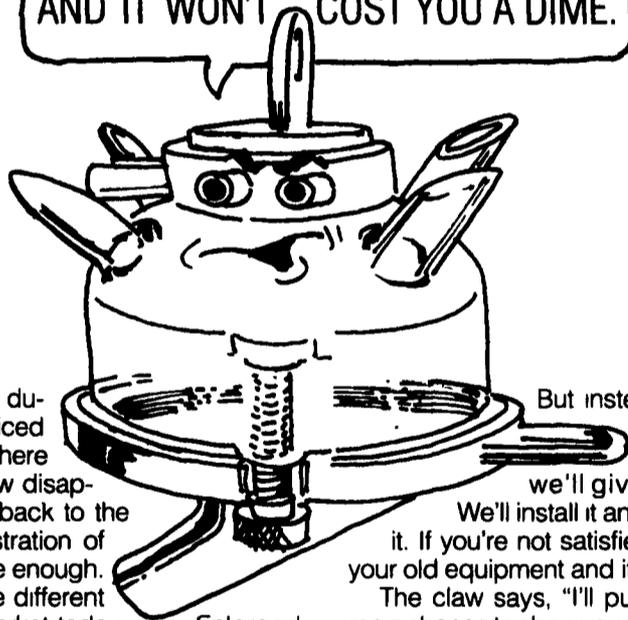
rich dishes with cream sauces or gravy? Do you have cake and ice cream for dessert, rather than fresh fruit? Routine habits make more of a difference than whether or not you indulge in a hamburger or steak occasionally. And, you cannot leave exercise out of the equation. Fighting the sedentary lifestyle by finding a sport or activity — even taking walks — that you enjoy and can do regularly can influence your prospects for good health and fitness.

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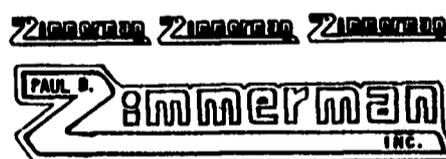
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