

Beef: What's Really in it for You?

By Amy Mowry, Michigan

Editor's Note: The following essay earned Reserve Intermediate Creative Writing at the 2007 AGJA Gateway Classic. It is in its original and unedited form.

Beef is consumed 77.8 million times each day in America. The beef industry is worth an estimated \$175 billion, with over one million businesses, farms, and ranches. Are you one of the eight out of ten households that eat fresh beef at home regularly? That is about an average of two times a week.

A well known form of beef, ground beef accounts for 63 percent of fresh beef served at home. Ground beef is not only tasty, versatile, and easy to chew, but it contains important nutrients especially important for children to grow and develop. Of course there are those who will eat beef no matter what. One of those people includes me. For some it's everyday life and its time some actually learn what's in that hunk of beef you may love (as I hope) or hate.

There are good sources as well as bad sources. Fat is an important part of your diet because it provides energy storage, transports fat-soluble vitamins, and insulates body tissues. Many cuts are 20 percent leaner than they were 14 years ago. This is great because it means there's still some fat, but for those worried so much about it, you can still enjoy your favorite cut of beef. Not to mention the other health benefits, some of which are later to come. Now sixty percent of all muscle cuts sold retail and 17 out of 20 most popular cuts muscle cuts meet government guidelines for lean. These guidelines are less than ten grams of total fat, 4.5 grams or less of saturated fat, and less than 95 milligrams of cholesterol per serving.

One three ounce serving of beef is a good source of five essential nutrients and even better, excellent sources of five other essential vitamins. Research has shown people who eat more beef; consume more nutrients than those who eat little to no beef. The ten essential nutrients in beef include: protein, zinc, vitamin B12, selenium, phosphorus, niacin, vitamin B6, iron, riboflavin, and choline. These nutrients play an important role in helping prevent some of the major health problems, including brain function, bone health, heart health, and obesity. Here are some nutrients and why they are important.

Beef is the number one food source for one of the important nutrients in the American diet. Which of the ten is it? Protein is the answer. Protein is essential for your metabolism and as a source of energy. It's also the building block for all body tissue like muscles, bones, and organs. As you can see without protein we couldn't survive.

49 percent of women and 41 percent of men over 20 don't meet the dietary needs for this nutrient. What is it? This nutrient is zinc. Zinc is critical for growth and development, immune system maintenance, resistance to infection, wound healing, and appetite control. So knowing this why do people still not get the needed amount? Do you know how much zinc is in your diet?

B-vitamins help do what? They help use energy and regulate many chemical reactions. Beef is the number one food source of B12 and number three food source for vitamin B6. Also included in the B vitamin family is riboflavin of which beef is the number four food source and niacin which beef is also the number three food source for it in the American diet. These vitamins are essential for many things such as red blood cell

formation, healthy skin, growth, eye health, and for the nervous system. They have also been linked to helping prevent and protect many older adults against conditions like heart disease.

Other important nutrients include selenium, which may reduce the risk of certain types of cancer and heart disease, as well as helping to fight infections. Beef is the number two source for selenium in an American diet. Another one important in the formation of bones and teeth is phosphorus, also included in beef. Of course there are the other nutrients I could go on to describe, but I think you get the picture. You see some things are great about beef, but still it has some faults, but what doesn't. For now as long as you enjoy eating beef its fine for you to eat, even with all the added bonuses. Go enjoy some good old beef. It seems it can do no wrong.