Animal vs. Plant-Based Meat for Heart Health (NEW REVIEW!) Transcript

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Introduction to the review

How do plant-based meats stack up against their animal-base counterparts for heart health? Well, a new review was just published in the Canadian Journal of Cardiology authored by me and a few of my esteemed colleagues.

And just to get it out of the way, we were not paid to write this review.

Nutritional comparison of plant-based meats

We scoured the scientific literature for studies relevant to the topic of plant based meat alternatives and cardiovascular disease that were published between 1970 and August 2023. And regarding studies on the nutritional composition of plant-based meat alternatives, we focused on nutrients known to impact heart health like fiber and saturated fat.

And based on studies, on products sold in various markets across the globe, including in North America, Europe and Brazil, plant based meat, alternatives tended to contain less saturated, fat, less cholesterol and more fiber, and carbohydrates on average, with some studies reporting less calories, more polyunsaturated fats and less monounsaturate fats per serving compared to meat.

Trial evidence on cholesterol and body composition

And these differences are consistent with a more heart-healthy pattern. As for protein and sodium, the results were quite mixed, highlighting one of our take-home messages that plant-based meat alternatives can be highly variable in their nutritional content.

And this is partially due to the different types of protein, and fat sources that are used in the products. We also looked at randomized controlled trials, one of which dated back to 1990, which I found quite surprising, that pitted meat against plant-based alternatives and there were some common themes amongst the results.

The plant based products tended to lower total and LDL cholesterol levels, with some studies reporting reductions in APOB, waist circumference, and body weight, although only a few studies looked those last few outcomes.

Interestingly, there were no significant differences in blood pressure despite some of the trials using plant-based products that were high in salt content.

Heart-health takeaways and future research

So where does this leave us? It supports that swapping out meat for plant based meat alternatives is likely a more heart healthy choice, but next I would like to see long-term prospective studies evaluating hard outcomes like heart attacks and stroke to help support stronger conclusions about these products.