THE KINDEST CUT
A 10-Step Guide to Meat & Poultry
BY JAYNE HURLEY & BONNIE LIEBMAN

1 Check the serving size.
Health Canada says that a typical serving of cooked steak, roast, or chicken is 100 grams (3½ ounces). That’s about the size of a deck of cards.

And a typical serving of ground meat and poultry is supposed to be 60 grams cooked. That’s about two-thirds of a McDonald’s Quarter Pounder patty.

Those serving sizes may be what health authorities recommend, but typical?

Even diets designed to lower bad cholesterol, like the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension), use a more realistic 4 ounces (113 grams) of cooked meat. But if you want real realistic, look at typical servings at mid-priced restaurants.

There, a chicken breast weighs 140 to 170 grams cooked, and steaks range from 200 to 450 grams (7 to 16 ounces) raw, which cooks down to 150 to 340 grams.

So before you check the calories, saturated fat, or anything else, estimate your serving size.

If you buy half a kilo of meat or poultry for every two people, that’s 250 grams of raw meat—about 190 grams cooked—per serving. Our chart uses a 100-gram serving because it’s easy to adjust up or down.

2 Pick an extra lean cut.
Gram for gram, chicken breast meat has less fat than drumstick meat, which has less fat than wing meat, which has less fat than thigh meat.

But the difference between low-fat and fatty matters more for red meat. Pick a fattier chicken part like a skinless thigh and your 100-gram cooked serving ends up with 3 grams of saturated fat. Pick a fatty beef cut like bottom blade pot roast with a ¼” fat trim and you’re up to 11 grams of sat fat.

And more fat means more calories. Every 100 grams of cooked prime rib has 360 calories. In contrast, eye of round oven roast has only 210 calories in every 100 grams.

How many calories in that cereal? How much sodium in that soup? For about a decade now, Nutrition Facts labels have answered those questions...except in the one section of the grocery store where you might need Nutrition Facts the most.

When it comes to most fresh meat and poultry, you’re on your own.

A few grocery stores offer a binder with the missing numbers. But Nutrition Facts are absent from fresh meat and poultry labels, where shoppers need them. (And you’d never even see a binder unless you knew enough to ask.)

The only exceptions: A few companies put Nutrition Facts on brand-name meats or poultry voluntarily. And Health Canada requires them on ground meat and poultry.

But those labels can be deceptive. For example, the agency allows the word “lean” on steaks and chops that are up to 10 per cent fat. But it allows “lean” on ground beef that’s up to 17 per cent fat.

If you’d like to tell Health Canada how important honest Nutrition Facts on meat and poultry packages are, mail the coupon on p. 14. In the meantime, here’s a guide to finding your way around the meat case.

The information for this article was compiled by Namita Davis and Neera Chaudhary in Toronto, with help from Danielle Hazard in Washington, DC.

A “lean” cut of steak or roast can have no more than 10 per cent fat, and an “extra lean” cut can have no more than 7.5 per cent fat, according to Health Canada. However, you won’t find those claims on many packages. (The fat limits are looser for ground meats and poultry, but we’ll get to that later.)

Here’s the tricky part: which cuts are “lean” or “extra lean” depends on how much they’re trimmed. And the meat industry assumes that consumers are world-class trimmers.

The beef industry’s Web site only has nutrition facts for a rib eye grilling steak that’s trimmed by technicians of “all visible fat.” What about this rib eye? Sorry.

3 Trim and skin.
The Web site of the beef industry (beefinfo.org) has a handy “virtual beef nutrition counter” that gives calories, fat, and other nutrients (though the saturated fat is a “detail” that requires an extra click). Only one problem: the numbers apply to meats that the industry describes as either “trimmed of visible fat” or “lean only.”

Those meats have been meticulously trimmed by scalpel-welding technicians to remove all fat, not just around the outside of a steak or roast, but also inside the cut. So even fatty cuts like tenderloin, strip loin, and cross rib end up looking lean.

Photos: ©robynmac/fotolia.com (top), Namita Davis (bottom).
The pork industry’s Web site (putporkonyourfork.com) plays the same game. Its numbers are also “lean only.”

Since most consumers don’t trim with a scalpel, a more reasonable trim than “lean only” is ¼” trim. That’s what our chart uses for most cuts. When that wasn’t available, we used a 0” trim, which means that all the fat around the outside (but not the inside) of the meat is removed.

Even a ¼” trim may be leaner than what’s at your grocery store. So our numbers may underestimate what you get.

Some good news: It doesn’t matter if the fat is gone before you cook, as long as it’s gone before you eat. So if you don’t ask the butcher to trim your steaks or buy skinless poultry, trim and skin at home.

4 Select “AA.”
Prime beef is the fattiest. AA is the leanest. AAA is in the middle.
AA can save you some saturated fat, calories, and money, especially with fattier cuts like brisket. Just keep in mind that, since AA beef has less fat, you’ll want to cook it either hot and fast (a quick sauté, for example) or low and slow (like a stew or pot roast, which keeps in the moisture).

5 Watch out for “lean” ground beef.
How many shoppers know that “lean” means no more than 7.5 per cent fat on a steak or roast, but up to 17 per cent fat on ground meat or poultry? Likewise, “extra lean” means no more than 2 grams of saturated fat, no more than 7.5 per cent fat on a steak, but up to 10 per cent fat on ground meats.

It’s not clear why Health Canada allows ground beef and pork labels to trick consumers who are trying to follow advice to eat lean meat. Did the industry complain—possibly underestimating their products—so the government would require ground meats to carry Nutrition Facts labeling?

6 Look for ground turkey or chicken.
Ground turkey or chicken almost always has less fat than ground beef or pork. But some packages of ground poultry are fattier than others, in part because they include fattier wing and thigh meat. Check the Nutrition Facts. If a 100-gram serving of raw poultry—all Nutrition Facts must use numbers for raw meat—has no more than 2 grams of saturated fat, you’ve got the best ground poultry you’re likely to find.

7 Avoid added salt and water.
It may look like fresh pork with nothing added. But read the small print. If a pork label says “seasoned,” you may be paying pork prices for salted water. (“Seasoned” frozen poultry may also have added salt and water.) And it’s not a trivial amount of salt. Maple Leaf Prime Pork Tenderloin, Pork Loin Chops, or Pork Back or Side Ribs, for example, have roughly 300 milligrams of sodium in every 100 grams of raw meat. Sterling Silver’s Premium Pork line has similar numbers.

How much sodium is left in a larger, more realistic serving after cooking? The companies’ Web sites don’t say.

8 Choose poultry or fish over red meat.
Last year, researchers at the U.S. National Cancer Institute reported the results of the NIH-AARP Diet and Health Study.¹

Of some 500,000 participants, those who ate the most red meat (about 140 grams a day) were 30 per cent more likely to die—mostly of heart disease or cancer—over the next 10 years than those who ate the least red meat (about 20 grams a day).

In contrast, those who ate the most white meat (poultry and fish) had a slightly lower risk of dying over a decade than those who ate the least. (You may have heard that pork is “the other white meat,” but scientists lump pork in with beef, veal, and lamb.)

In other studies, red meat seemed to boost the risk of colon cancer (see June 2009, cover story). Researchers aren’t sure why. Two possibilities: red meat’s heme iron or the mutagens that form when red meat is overcooked may promote tumours.

9 Minimize mutagens.
Don’t overcook your meat or poultry. The browner it is, the more likely that it contains heterocyclic amines (HCAs), which may raise the risk of cancer.

Grilling and barbecuing create the most HCAs, followed by broiling and pan-frying. Baking, roasting, and stir-frying create fewer HCAs than broiling or pan-frying. Wet cooking methods (braising, stewing, poaching) generally produce the least.

A few tricks can minimize the HCAs when you grill or barbecue. Marinate the meat or poultry, even for a few minutes. Grill it using indirect heat (push the coals to the sides and cook the meat in the centre, or, if you use a gas grill, grill over an unlit element). And flip the food frequently to keep surface temperatures lower.

10 Think of the Earth.
It takes more water to produce beef and pork than any other foods, according to a 2006 report from the United Kilde Report, a Canadian government study. As a result, the Canadian public eats too much red and processed meat. Would solving the problem? It doesn’t.

Most shoppers are likely to simply trust that labels are honest when they call ground meats “lean” or “extra lean.” And even suspicious consumers can’t compare “lean” ground beef to “lean” steak, because steak packages have no Nutrition Facts. Bottom line: most ground beef and pork is fatty.
**Track Meat**

Best Bites (✔✔) have no more than 1.5 grams of saturated fat in every small, 100-gram cooked serving. We disqualified red meat, which may raise the risk of heart disease and cancer. Red meats are carefully trimmed (to 1/8" fat). Because recent 1/8" trim numbers were unavailable for pork, we used older numbers. Within each section, cuts are ranked from least to most saturated fat, then least to most calories.

### Poultry (100 grams cooked)

- ✔✔ Turkey breast, no skin: 170* 2* 0.5*
- ✔ Turkey drumstick, no skin: 170 6 1.5
- ✔ Turkey breast, with skin: 200 8 2
- ✔ Ground chicken or turkey, extra lean: 170* 8* 2.5*
- ✔ Turkey leg, no skin: 200* 7* 2.5*
- ✔ Turkey thigh, no skin: 210 11 3
- ✔ Turkey drumstick, with skin: 220 11 3
- ✔ Turkey leg, with skin: 210 11 3.5
- ✔ Turkey wing, with skin: 240 13 3.5
- ✔ Turkey chicken, with skin: 250 15 4.5
- ✔ Turkey wing, with skin: 290 19 5.5

### Beef (100 grams cooked, 1/8" trim unless noted)

- ✔ Top blade simmering steak, AA, 0" trim: 160 6 1.5
- ✔ Flank marinating steak, AA, 0" trim: 180 7 3
- ✔ Inside round marinating steak, AA: 200 8 3
- ✔ Eye of round oven roast, AA: 200 9 3.5
- ✔ Flank marinating steak, AAA, 0" trim: 200 9 4
- ✔ Eye of round oven roast, AAA: 210 10 4
- ✔ Outside round oven roast, AA: 210 11 4
- ✔ Sirloin tip oven roast, AA: 210 10 4
- ✔ Inside round marinating steak, AAA: 220 10 4
- ✔ Outside round marinating steak, AA: 240 11 4
- ✔ Bottom sirloin oven roast, AAA, 0" trim: 220 12 4.5
- ✔ Ground beef, extra lean, maximum 10% fat: 220 12 4.5
- ✔ Outside round oven roast, AAA: 220 12 4.5
- ✔ Sirloin tip oven roast, AAA: 230 12 4.5
- ✔ Top sirloin grilling steak, AA: 230 13 5
- ✔ Outside round marinating steak, AAA: 250 13 5
- ✔ Top blade simmering steak, AAA, 0" trim: 230 14 5.5
- ✔ Top sirloin grilling steak, AAA: 260 16 6
- ✔ Ground beef, lean, maximum 17% fat: 260 17 6.5
- ✔ Rib eye grilling steak, AAA, 0" trim: 270 17 6.5
- ✔ Tenderloin grilling steak, AAA: 270 18 7
- ✔ Brisket simmering steak, AA: 280 17 7
- ✔ Ground beef, medium, maximum 23% fat: 280 19 7

### Pork (100 grams cooked, 1/8" trim unless noted)

- ✔ Tenderloin, 0" trim: 170 6 2
- ✔ Boneless sirloin chop: 210 9 3
- ✔ Boneless loin roast, sirloin end, 0" trim: 210 9 3.5
- ✔ Boneless loin chop, centre cut: 230 11 4
- ✔ Boneless loin roast, centre cut: 230 11 4
- ✔ Bone-in loin chop: 230 13 5
- ✔ Bone-in loin chop, rib end: 260 15 5.5
- ✔ Boneless loin chop, rib end: 260 16 6
- ✔ Rib roast, with bone: 260 15 6
- ✔ Shoulder butt steak: 260 17 6
- ✔ Ground pork, lean, maximum 17% fat: 300 21 7.5
- ✔ Country style ribs, with bone: 330 25 9
- ✔ Side Ribs, no trim specified: 400 30 11

### Lamb (New Zealand, 100 grams cooked, 1/8" trim)

- ✔ Leg: 230 14 7
- ✔ Shank: 260 16 8
- ✔ Loin chop: 300 21 10.5
- ✔ Shoulder: 340 24 11.5
- ✔ Rib roast: 320 26 13

### Veal (100 grams cooked, no trim specified)

- ✔ Cutlet: 160 5 2
- ✔ Shoulder arm steak: 180 8 3.5
- ✔ Shoulder blade steak: 190 9 3.5
- ✔ Loin chop: 220 12 5.5
- ✔ Rib roast: 230 14 5.5

### For comparison (100 grams cooked)

- ✔ Haddock: 110 1 0
- ✔ Tuna, canned: 120 1 0
- ✔ Flounder: 120 2 0.5
- ✔ Tilapia: 130 3 1
- ✔ Wild Coho Salmon: 140 4 1

**Best Bite. *Estimate.**

Note: AA is based on U.S. numbers for Select grade. AAA is based on U.S. choice grade. Canada’s nutrient database doesn’t distinguish between beef grades.

**Daily Saturated Fat Limit** (for a 2,000-calorie diet; 20 grams).

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Nations called *Livestock’s Long Shadow*,

“...In the United States, livestock are responsible for 55 per cent of erosion, 37 per cent of pesticides applied, 50 per cent of the volume of antibiotics consumed and for 32 per cent of the nitrogen load and 33 per cent of the phosphorus load into freshwater resources,” says the report. (Statistics from other countries weren’t available.)

What’s more, livestock accounts for 18 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions—more than transportation. That’s because cattle emit methane, a greenhouse gas that’s 25 times more destructive than carbon dioxide.

Not a vegetarian? Would it kill you to eat like one every once in a while? 🍗