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## Britons turn away from meat after health scare

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Millions of Britons are cutting meat from their diets as they try to lose weight and heed health warnings over processed foods such as bacon, ham and sausages.

Nearly a third of people have reduced their meat consumption over the past year, according to figures from the British Social Attitudes survey. Forty-four per cent have either cut back, plan to do so, or are vegetarian already.

The research follows a series of health scandals, from BSE in cattle in the late 1980s to the discovery of horsemeat in beef products in 2013. Experts said that consumption could fall further after the World Health Organisation classified processed meats as definitely cancer-causing and red meat as probably carcinogenic last year.

The survey found that 29 per cent of people had reduced the amount of meat they eat in the past 12 months. A further 9 per cent said that they were considering reducing their meat intake or cutting it out entirely. Up to 3 per cent are vegetarian or vegan.

Women were more likely than men to cut back on meat, and older people more likely than the young. When asked why they had taken a step towards vegetarianism 58 per cent cited health reasons. A fifth said that it was an attempt to save money and about the same number cited concerns over animal welfare or food safety.

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High-profile vegetarian cookbooks have spurred a trend for replacing meat with vegetables and pulses. Last year *Deliciously Ella*, a vegetarian book by the food blogger Ella Woodward, achieved the highest ever first-week sales for a debut cookbook. Many gurus of “clean eating”, including the actress Gwyneth Paltrow, also advise followers to avoid red meat and all processed or non-organic meats.

Figures from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) in December showed a fall in meat sales from 1,049g per person per week in 2004 to 955g a decade later.

As the price of beef rose by 35 per cent between 2007 and 2014 the quantity purchased went down by 20 per cent, according to the figures from Defra. For lamb, a 42 per cent increase in price resulted in a 32 per cent drop in sales.

Rod Addy, editor of the *Meat Trades Journal*, said that pork was struggling, with the 12 weeks to October last year showing a decline of 10.5 per cent in sales value and 4.7 per cent in volume.

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Ian Simpson, of NatCen Social Research, which conducted the survey, said: “A significant number of people in Britain, amounting to many millions, told us that they have reduced their meat consumption over the past 12 months. Many

people are clearly concerned about eating too much meat and the primary driver of this concern appears to be concerns about health.”

The NHS says that too much red and processed meat can increase the likelihood of bowel cancer, with two rashers a day raising the risk by 18 per cent.

[Emer Delaney](#), a specialist dietitian, said that patients attending her clinics had “grabbed on to the meat message” and were replacing meat with fish, as well as pulses, beans and lentils.

Catherine Collins, a dietitian at St George’s hospital in London, pointed to how people were eating meat. “People are eating things like fajitas or spaghetti bolognese rather than a slab of meat, pork chop or a steak,” she said. “They are extending meat a lot more, using things like a sauce that doesn’t need much meat per serving because you are bulking it out with vegetables.”

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People with libertarian, pro-welfare state and left-wing views were more likely to either not eat meat or have cut back. The survey was commissioned by the Vegetarian Society and involved 2,878 interviews with a representative, random sample of adults in Britain.