

# New Research

## New Research Affirms Nitrite Safety And Benefits

(NAPSA)—Nitrite. Media reports cite this important food additive as if it's something to fear rather than a safe, beneficial food ingredient. So what is nitrite? And why do meat processors add it to some products?

Nitrite is a salt that is used to make "cured meats" like ham, salami, hot dogs and bacon. In centuries past, before refrigeration, meat was salted to preserve it. Early sausage makers recognized that using certain salts produced a distinct pink color and smoky flavor in meat products. In the 1800s, scientists came to understand that the salts contained nitrate, which became nitrite when added to meat. Not only did "curing" create a unique taste and color, it also delayed spoilage—a critical benefit before refrigeration. While we have refrigeration today, many consumers continue to enjoy the distinct taste of cured meats.

### Sources Of Nitrite

Most people don't realize, however, that their nitrite intake comes largely from vegetables and saliva. According to a poll by Opinion Dynamics, one-third of consumers wrongly cited cured meats as the largest nitrite source. Only 23 percent recognized vegetables and only 2 percent recognized saliva as top sources.

Nitrite expert Dr. Nathan Bryan at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston isn't surprised, because he says there are many myths about nitrite sources and safety. His analysis



**Cured meats that contain nitrite, like vegetables and water that contribute nitrite to the diet, are a safe and beneficial part of a balanced diet.**

shows that a spinach salad and a ham sandwich contribute the same exposure of nitrite to the diet, while a liter of popular pomegranate juice contains 100 times more nitrite than a hot dog. Other major sources include broccoli, beets, celery, lettuce and even human saliva, due to our body's ability to reduce nitrate to nitrite. Dr. Bryan says the body makes nitrite as part of its own healthy nitrogen cycle, and scientists are just beginning to understand its many health benefits.

"Nitrite can prevent injury from a heart attack, control blood pressure, promote wound healing, help treat sickle cell anemia and many other health conditions and may even prevent disease progression," he said. Old myths about an

alleged link to cancer are very weak at best, he said, and recent data reveal anti-tumor activity.

"Our research shows that when nitrite is applied directly to tumor cell lines, it does not promote tumor growth. And when ascorbate (vitamin C) is added together with nitrite, cell growth is inhibited," he said. The good news: Vitamin C is routinely added with nitrite to cured meats.

### Food Safety Benefits

Consumers who hear the word "botulism" think it's a disease of the past. When it comes to cured meats, it certainly is. Why? Since nitrite has been added routinely to commercially cured meat products, no case of botulism has been linked to cured meats.

Meat scientists now understand that nitrite in cured meats is also extremely effective in reducing other bacteria that can still pose a problem, like the germ that causes the food-borne illness listeriosis.

"Consumers shouldn't fear nitrite; the medical community certainly doesn't anymore," noted Randy Huffman, Ph.D., president of the AMI Foundation. "Nitrite has demonstrated public health benefits. And consumers who learn the most current facts surrounding nitrite will appreciate nitrite's food safety value."

For a brochure on common ingredients in processed meat products, visit [www.MeatMattersInfo.org](http://www.MeatMattersInfo.org) or send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to AMI, 1150 Connecticut Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20036.