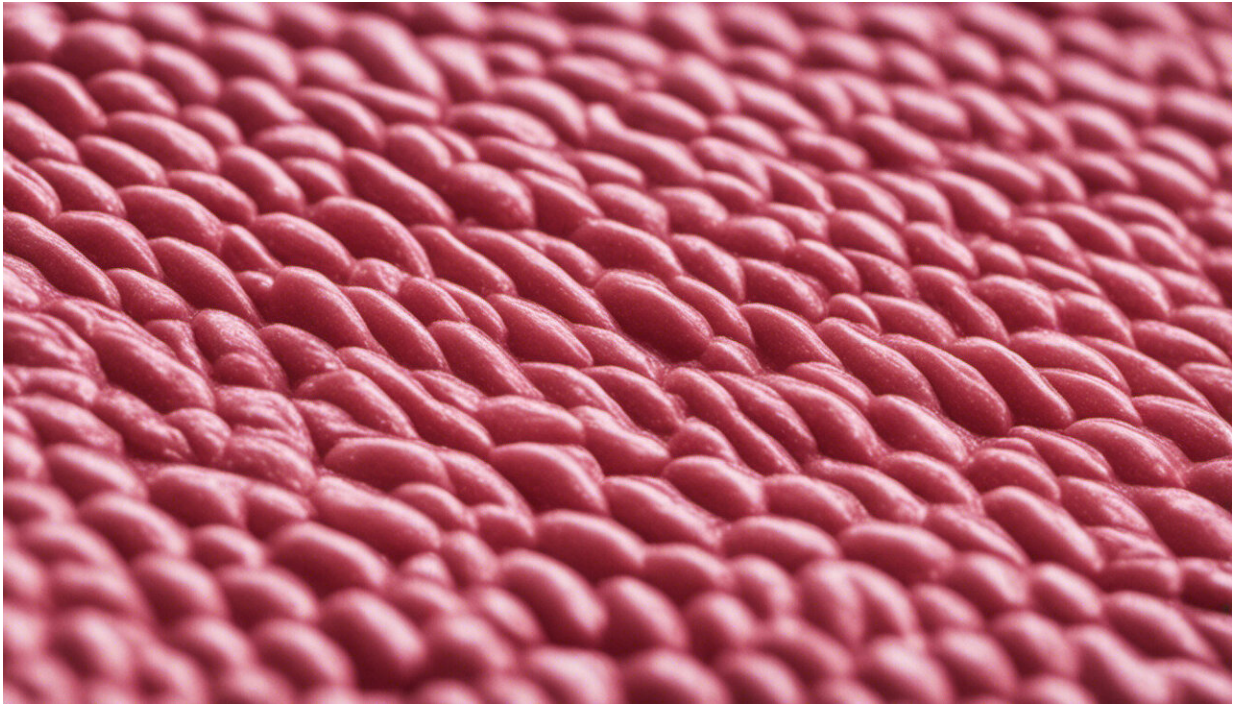


The link between meat and social status

September 7 2018



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Eating meat is a symbol of power and status, and those who see themselves as having lower socio-economic status prefer meat, and eat more meat, due to this perception, according to new research from Monash University and the University of Technology Sydney (UTS).

The paper, published this week in the journal *Appetite*, found participants who rated themselves lower on socio-economic [status](#)

showed a stronger preference for [meat](#)-based foods compared to participants who rated themselves higher on a socio-economic scale.

Marketing psychology researchers Dr Eugene Chan from Monash Business School and Dr Natalina Zlatevska from UTS Business School conducted the research to better understand the psychological drivers of [meat consumption](#) and how these might be influenced.

"There is a symbolic association between eating meat and strength, power and masculinity. It is traditionally a high-status food, brought out for guests or as the centrepiece of festive occasions, so we wanted to better understand this link to status," says Dr Zlatevska.

Using a range of experiments the researchers were able to show that it was desire for status that drove preference for meat, rather than other variables such as hunger or perceived nutritional benefits.

One experiment involved a "beast burger" that was described as either meat-based or vegetarian, but with the same nutritional profile and packaging. There was increased desire for the meat-based product only from those who rated themselves lower in socio-economic status.

Attitudes towards meat eating, and ways to shift consumption, are of interest to consumer psychologists, the meat industry, and advocates of reduced meat consumption for health, environmental or animal welfare reasons.

Doctors and nutritionists generally advise individuals to eat less [red meat](#), particularly processed meat such as sausage and salami, as the World Health Organisation has found a strong link between eating processed meat and cancer.

"Our research reveals that while eating meat appears to confer feelings

of power and status, this may have health implications for those who see themselves as lower on the socio-economic ladder," says Dr Chan.

Research from the UK and France has shown blue-collar workers and lower earning households consume more red and processed meat than higher income households, which lends support to the Australian research.

Australians consume around 92.5 kg of meat per person a year according to OECD data, significantly more than the global average. The number of Australians who describe their diet as vegetarian has been gradually increasing – currently around 11 per cent of the population.

The researchers hypothesize that nudging people to feel either higher or lower in [socio-economic status](#), for example through social comparison or marketing messages, could influence levels of meat consumption.

More information: Eugene Y. Chan et al. Jerkies, tacos, and burgers: Subjective socioeconomic status and meat preference, *Appetite* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.appet.2018.08.027](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2018.08.027)

Provided by University of Technology, Sydney

Citation: The link between meat and social status (2018, September 7) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-09-link-meat-social-status.html>

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