

Reindeer meat is as healthy as fish

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Reindeer meat is one of the leanest meats. It also compares favourably with fish when it comes to omega-3 and essential fatty acids.

If you want your diet to be low in fat and high in B-12, omega-3, omega-6 and essential fatty acids, you might think your only choice is a trip to the fish market. But a recent study from the University of Tromsø shows that reindeer is one of the healthiest kinds of meat you can put on your plate.

“Reindeer meat is very healthy,” says Ammar Eltayeb Ali Hassan, a PhD candidate at the university’s Faculty of Health Sciences. “It contains more than double the values of some nutrients than other meats, and comparable to chicken in fat.”

A careful analysis

Over the past several years, Hassan has analysed meat, liver, tallow and bone marrow sampled from 131 reindeer from four Norwegian counties and 14 grazing areas. His findings should please those who are careful about what they eat.

“The meat is high in the essential fatty acids that humans only get from the foods they eat. Although oily fish is an important source of essential fatty acids in the Norwegian diet, the levels of some of these substances in reindeer meat is comparable to those found in seafood such as cod, crab, mussels, oysters and scampi. Additionally, 100 grams of reindeer meat contains the daily recommended dose of omega-3 and 6,” says Hassan, who is also a veterinarian.

Low fat

Hassan has lived in Norway for 15 years, and he enjoys this distinctively Norwegian meat, which also offers a number of other health benefits. With a fat content of only two per cent, reindeer meat is very lean. Beef typically has a fat content of nine percent, with lamb as high as 17 percent.

“Reindeer meat also has more than twice as much vitamin B12 than, say, veal or lamb. Vitamin B12 is essential to the human diet to prevent anaemia, among other things,” he adds.

One reason that reindeer meat is so healthy could be the animal’s diet, which is comprised mainly of lichens in the winter and green plants in the summer.

“Lichen improves the animal’s digestion, and is also rich in minerals. As a result, the meat contains high amounts of vitamin B12, selenium, zinc and iron,” Hassan says.

Cadmium

Hassan has also looked into possible drawbacks to eating reindeer meat.

“The only thing we found was cadmium in the liver, which was at a higher level than the maximum limit set by the EU. After we had discovered this, we went ahead and looked at SAMINOR, the Health Interview Survey in areas with Sami and Norwegian settlements, but it turns out that liver consumption even among those who eat a lot of reindeer is so low that there is no health hazard,” Hassan says.

The cadmium levels in reindeer liver are only dangerous if you eat more than 2.7 kg of this type of liver per month, and it is extremely unusual for anyone to eat this amount of reindeer liver.

Good news for food website

Magnus Tvedt-Øresland works at Matprat, a food information web site operated by the Norwegian Egg and Meat Information Bureau. He explains that the bureau has not focused on the nutrients in reindeer meat.

“It's great that such an exotic meat is so healthy, “ he says.

The bureau has set a goal of reaching quality-conscious women and men aged 30-55 years with information about reindeer meat, which Tvedt-Øresland says “gives consumers a tasty experience of enjoying the best that Norwegian nature has to offer.”

“People often eat reindeer meat with cream sauces or other dairy products that are high in fat, but there are certainly healthier ways of cooking the meat. Reindeer is a product with great potential, and there is a clear demand,” he says.

Today the average Norwegian eats 300 grams of reindeer meat per year. Hardly any reindeer meat is exported.

 [Norwegians eat on average 300 grams of reindeer meat per year. \(Photo: Paul Weaver\) \[6\]](#)

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[Hassan, Ammar Eltayeb Ali: Nutrients and toxic elements in semidomesticated reindeer in Norway. Nutritional and Food Safety Aspects. Doctoral thesis, University of Tromsø. 2012 \(abstract\) \[13\]](#)

Side story

Side story

Reindeer game casserole

Time: over 60 minutes

Make a lovely and unfussy game casserole with reindeer meat. Let the casserole simmer for about an hour, to develop a whole lot of flavour. If you don't have rump steak, you can also use boneless stewing meat or a reindeer roast.

Ingredients (4 people)

750 g reindeer rump steak or roast

1 teaspoon salt

½ teaspoon pepper
2 table spoons flour
2 table spoons butter
150 g bacon cut in small pieces
1 onion
2 finely chopped cloves of garlic
200 g mushrooms
2 chopped carrots
1 chopped parsley root
2 chopped celery sticks
4 dl game or beef stock
½ bottle of red wine
4 crushed juniper berries
1 bay leaf
1 teaspoon pink pepper

How to do it:

Cut the meat in squares of about 3x3 cm. Fry the bacon and onion in a frying pan with some butter. Put it in the casserole. Fry the mushrooms, celery, carrots, and parsley root and put it in the casserole. Turn the meat in some flour, and brown all sides of the meat a few times. Season with salt and pepper.

Put everything in the casserole, and pour the stock and the wine over, together with the rest of the seasoning. Put to the boil and let it simmer on a low heat for an hour or until the meat is tender. Garnish with chopped herbs.

Serve with mashed potatoes with herbs.

Recipe and photo: matprat.no [14]

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