

Antibiotics in Meat

A recent report by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) sounded yet another alarm about the growing crisis of antibiotic resistance. The report says that farmers give too many antibiotics to food animals like cattle and poultry. Let's look at the problem and see how the choices we make at the supermarket can make a difference.

Antibiotics & Animals

Just like humans, animals get sick. Antibiotics help them get better. (Of course, if the animals are raised humanely, they are less likely to get sick. But that's another article!) Food animals treated with antibiotics must go through a withdrawal period before slaughter. This ensures that the food we eat does not contain antibiotic residue. It sounds good, but it's not the whole story.

Antibiotics are used for more than just treating sick animals. Now it is common practice to routinely add antibiotics to the feed of healthy animals. This is done to promote growth and prevent disease. Food producers often use the drugs without the oversight of a veterinarian.



Antibiotic Resistance

Routinely giving healthy animals antibiotics produces bacteria that are resistant to the drugs. These bacteria are in the meat we buy at the grocery store. When they infect people, the antibiotics we usually use to fight them do no good. Infections that were once easily cured become life-threatening.

At the Supermarket

As consumers, we can help fight antibiotic resistance by purchasing meat and poultry that is raised without antibiotics. However, the labels can be confusing. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA):

- Certified Organic means that antibiotics are never used.
- Raised Without Antibiotics, No Antibiotics Administered, No Antibiotics Added: There is no standard definition of these claims, but the producer must prove that the animal never received antibiotics.
- USDA Process Verified + one of the claims above: Process Verified means that the producer paid the USDA to verify that no antibiotics were ever used.
- Claims that do NOT mean that no antibiotics were used:
 - Natural
 - Antibiotic-free
 - No antibiotic residue

You can find a complete list of food companies, brands, and restaurants that have committed to producing or selling only meat and poultry raised without antibiotics here: <http://bit.ly/1CxN1qK>.

By Hollis Bass, MEd, RD, LD

BROUGHT TO YOU BY: