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Anderson, J. J. , Darwis, N. D.M., Mackay, D. F., Celis-Morales, C., Lyall, D. M., Sattar, N., Gill, J. M.R. and Pell, J. P. (2018) Red and processed meat consumption and breast cancer: UK Biobank cohort study and meta-analysis. *European Journal of Cancer*, 90, pp. 73-82. (doi:10.1016/j.ejca.2017.11.022)

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Deposited on: 01 December 2017

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Red and processed meat consumption and breast cancer: UK Biobank cohort study and meta-analysis

Running title: Meat consumption and breast cancer in UK Biobank

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Abstract

Aim: Red and processed meat may be risk factors for breast cancer due to their iron content, administration of oestrogens to cattle, or mutagens created during cooking. We studied the associations in UK Biobank, then included the results in a meta-analysis of published cohort studies.

Methods: UK Biobank, a general population cohort study, recruited participants aged 40-69 years. Incident breast cancer was ascertained via linkage to routine hospital admission, cancer registry and death certificate data. Univariate and multivariable Cox proportional hazard models were used to explore the associations between red and processed meat consumption and breast cancer. Previously published cohort studies were identified from a systematic review using PubMed and Ovid, and a meta-analysis conducted using a random effects model.

Results: Over a median of seven years follow-up, 4,819 of the 262,195 women developed breast cancer. The risk was increased in the highest tertile (>9g/day) of processed meat consumption (adjusted HR 1.21, 95% CI 1.08-1.35, p=0.001) Collation with ten previous cohort studies provided data on 40,257 incident breast cancers in 1.65 million women. On meta-analysis, processed meat consumption was associated with overall (RR 1.06, 95% CI 1.01-1.11) and post-menopausal (RR 1.09, 95% CI 1.03-1.15), but not pre-menopausal (RR 0.99, 95% CI 0.88-1.10), breast cancer. In UK Biobank and the meta-analysis, red meat consumption was not associated with breast cancer (adjusted HR 0.99 95% CI 0.88-1.12 and RR 1.03, 95% CI 0.99-1.08, respectively).

Conclusions: Consumption of processed meat, but not red meat, may increase the risk of breast cancer.

Keywords

breast cancer; pre-menopausal; post-menopausal; diet; red meat; processed meat; UK Biobank

1. Introduction

In the United Kingdom, one in eight women will develop breast cancer [1] but more than one-quarter of cases could be prevented by reduced exposure to exogenous oestrogens, reduced obesity, increased physical activity and breastfeeding [1]. There is a lack of consensus on whether red and processed meat consumption are risk factors for breast cancer [2]. Four meta-analyses have produced conflicting results [3-6] due to wide inclusion criteria resulting in the inclusion of very heterogeneous studies. We studied whether red and processed meat consumption were associated with the risk of breast cancer in UK Biobank; then included the results in a meta-analysis of prospective cohort studies using rigorous inclusion criteria.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. UK Biobank

UK Biobank recruited 273,466 women aged 40-69 years from the general population between 2007 and 2010. Baseline socioeconomic and lifestyle information were collected via a self-completed, touch-screen questionnaire and anthropometric measurements taken by trained staff. Self-reported moderate and vigorous physical activity were converted to METs.min.week^{-1}, and dichotomized to inactive (<600 METs.min.week^{-1}) and active (≥600 METs.min.week^{-1}). Dietary information was collected using a self-completed food frequency questionnaire. Frequency of beef, pork and lamb intake (excluding processed meat) and frequency of processed meat intake were recorded. These were converted into probabilities of daily consumption, multiplied by normal portion sizes [7], and then weighted by size of portion: small 0.5, medium 1.0 or large 1.5. We then derived four categories of red/processed meat intake: zero intake and tertiles of consumption for those consuming some. Follow-up information (min 5.33 years, max 9.89 years) on the date of first diagnosis of cancer was obtained via linkage to three routine administrative databases: cancer registrations, death certificates and hospital admissions. Date and cause of death were obtained from death certificates held by the National Health Service (NHS) Information Centre (England and Wales) and the NHS Central Register Scotland (Scotland). Date and cause of hospital admissions were obtained from the Health Episode Statistics (HES) for England and Wales and the Scottish Morbidity Record 01 (SMR01) for Scotland. At the time of analysis, mortality data were available up to 31 January 2016 and hospital admission and cancer registry data until 31 March 2015. Therefore, follow-up was censored at 31 January 2016 or date of death if this occurred earlier. There were 54 participants that withdrew consent from UK Biobank at the time of analysis. All databases used the International Classification of Diseases and we defined breast cancer as ICD10 code C50.

We excluded women with a record of breast cancer at baseline. Cox proportional hazard models were used to examine the associations between red/processed meat consumption and breast cancer using zero consumption as the referent category. We ran four incremental models for each: univariate, multivariable adjusted for sociodemographic factors (age, sex, ethnic group and deprivation index); multivariable also adjusted for lifestyle factors (smoking status, frequency of alcohol consumption, body mass index and physical activity) and multivariable also adjusted for potential dietary confounders (cooked vegetables, raw vegetables, and type of bread). We tested for statistical interactions and, where significant, sub-group analyses were undertaken. All analyses were repeated after stratifying women into pre- and post-menopausal subgroups. In the latter we included use of hormone replacement therapy as a covariate in the fully adjusted model. We also conducted landmark analyses, excluding the first two years of follow-up. This study was performed under generic ethical approval obtained by UK Biobank from the NHS National Research Ethics Service (ref 11/NW/0382, 17 June 2011). All analyses were undertaken using Stata v14.

2.2. Meta-analysis

Two authors (JJA and NDMD) searched Pubmed and Ovid using the search term breast cancer combined with meat, red meat, processed meat, preserved meat, pork, beef, veal, mutton, lamb, ham, sausage or bacon; consistent with the most recently published meta-analysis [6]. However, inclusion was restricted to prospective, general population cohort studies. We excluded case-control studies and studies that measured only beef intake. Where more than one study was conducted on the same cohort, only the most recent was included. The last search was conducted on 15 January 2017. Meta-analysis was undertaken using a random effects model; stratified by type of meat (red and processed) and outcome (pre-menopausal, post-menopausal and overall breast cancer). We performed Egger's and Begg's tests and used funnel plots to assess potential bias. Heterogeneity between the studies was tested using the I-squared statistic. All analyses were undertaken using Stata v14.

3. Results

3.1. UK Biobank

Of the 273,466 female participants, 262,195 had no record of breast cancer at baseline and, therefore, were eligible for inclusion. Of these, 4,819 (1.8%) developed incident breast cancer over a median follow-up period of seven years [IQR 6.3 to 7.7]. The participants who developed breast cancer were older, more affluent, less physically active, and more likely to be white and former smokers, had higher body mass indices, reported lower alcohol and raw vegetable intake, but higher intake of red and processed meat (Table 1).

Overall, 3,303 (1.3%) of the 262,195 women had missing data on consumption of red meat; of the remainder, 22,435 (8.6%) consumed no red meat, 118,744 (45.3%) consumed <19 g/day, 43,727 (16.7%) 19-25 g/day and 73,986 (28.2%) >25 g/day. In relation to processed meat consumption, 1,089 (0.4%) had missing data and, of the remainder, 32,977 (12.6%) consumed none, 101,144 (38.6%) <4 g/day, 71,706 (27.4%) 4-9 g/day and 55,279 (21.1%) >9g/day.

In the univariate Cox proportional hazards model, there was a significant overall association between red meat consumption and risk of incident breast cancer (Table 2). Adjustment for potential sociodemographic confounders attenuated the overall association and, following further adjustment for potential lifestyle and dietary confounders, it was no longer statistically significant. There were no significant interactions with any of the covariates or menopausal status. On sub-group analyses, the associations between red meat consumption and breast cancer were not significant in either pre- or post-menopausal women. Landmark analyses,

excluding the first two years of follow-up, did not alter the results. Supplementary Table 1 contains the results re-run using the lowest tertile of red meat intake as the referent category.

In the univariate analysis, there was a statistically significant dose-response relationship between processed meat consumption and breast cancer (Table 2). Adjustment for potential sociodemographic, lifestyle and dietary confounders did not attenuate the results. There was a significant dose-response relationship across the tertiles of processed meat consumption; whereby participants in the low, medium and highest tertiles of consumption remained significantly more likely to develop breast cancer than those with zero intake. In the fully adjusted model the results were: <4g/day HR 1.15 95% CI 1.04-1.28, p=0.007; 4-9g/day HR 1.19 95% CI 1.07-1.33, p=0.002; >9g/day HR 1.21 95% CI 1.08-1.35, p=0.001 (overall p_{trend}= 0.005). There was a statistically significant interaction with the intake of cooked vegetables (p=0.009). There was a weaker association between processed meat intake and breast cancer among participants with the lowest intake of cooked vegetable. This was due to the absolute risk already being higher in this sub-group; among participants who ate no processed meat, the incidence of breast cancer was 2.46 per 1,000 population per annum among those with low intake of cooked vegetables compared with only 2.01 per 1,000 per annum among those with high vegetable intake. Among participants who had the highest intake of processed meat, the incidence of breast cancer was 2.55 per 1,000 population per annum among those with low cooked vegetable intake and 2.35 per 1,000 per annum among those with high intake. There was no significant interaction with menopausal status. However, in the sub-group of pre-menopausal women, the increased risk of breast cancer only reached statistical significance in the highest tertile of processed meat intake (fully adjusted model: <4g/day HR 1.24 95% CI 0.98-1.57, p=0.069; 4-9g/day HR 1.21 95% CI 0.95-1.54, p=0.131; >9g/day HR 1.32 95% CI 1.03-1.69, p=0.032). Among post-menopausal women, the risk of breast cancer was significantly higher among all groups that consumed processed meat (fully adjusted model: <4g/day HR 1.16 95% CI 1.03-1.31, p=0.016; 4-9g/day HR 1.20 95% CI 1.05-1.36, p=0.006; >9g/day HR 1.20 95% CI 1.05-1.37, p=0.008). In the landmark analyses, excluding

the first two years of follow-up, the effect estimates remained unaffected (fully adjusted model: <4g/day HR 1.15 95% CI 1.02-1.29, p=0.022; 4-9g/day HR 1.19 95% CI 1.05-1.34, p=0.006; >9g/day HR 1.23 95% CI 1.08-1.39, p=0.002).. Supplementary Table 1 shows the results re-run using the first tertile of processed meat consumption as the reference category.

3.2. Meta-analysis

A total of 124 and 84 publications were identified by searching the Pubmed and Ovid databases, respectively, of which 78 were excluded as duplicates. The remaining 130 articles were screened, together with nine additional publications identified from reference lists. Of these, 122 were excluded because they did not satisfy the inclusion criteria. A further five studies were excluded due to repeat analyses conducted on the same cohort and two due to inadequate exposure information; resulting in ten eligible cohort studies in addition to UK Biobank (Figure 1). The ten previous studies comprised a total of 35,438 incident cancers occurring in 1,386,799 women [8-17]. Combined with UK Biobank this produced a total of eleven studies with data on 40,257 incident cancers in 1,648,994 women (Table 3).

Of the eleven cohort studies, ten reported the association between red meat consumption and overall risk of breast cancer; of these, six also reported results separately for pre-menopausal and post-menopausal breast cancer. The eleventh study only examined the association with post-menopausal breast cancer (Table 3). The ten studies produced a pooled relative risk for breast cancer, overall, of 1.03 (95% CI 0.99-1.08) (Figure 2). The funnel plot was reasonably symmetrical with one small study outlier (Supplementary Figure 1a) and both Begg's (p=0.210) and Egger's (p=0.317) tests were non-significant. Overall there was medium level heterogeneity (I^2 44.0%) that was not statistically significant (p=0.065).

The six studies on pre-menopausal breast cancer produced a pooled relative risk for high consumption of red meat of 1.02 (95% CI 0.92-1.11) (Figure 2). Both Begg's (p=0.573) and

Egger's (p=0.272) tests were non-significant indicating no significant publication bias and the funnel plot was symmetrical with no study outliers (Supplementary Figure 1b). The level of heterogeneity was low (I^2 0.0%) and not statistically significant (p=0.530). The pooled relative risk for post-menopausal breast cancer, from the six relevant studies, was 1.03 (95% CI 0.97-1.08) (Figure 2). Both Begg's (p=0.764) and Egger's (p=0.483) tests were non-significant and the funnel plot was symmetrical with one small study outlier (Supplementary Figure 1c). Overall there was low heterogeneity (I^2 34.6%) that was not statistically significant (p=0.177).

Of the nine cohort studies on processed meat consumption, eight examined the association with overall risk of breast cancer (Figure 3); five of these also studied both pre- and post-menopausal breast cancer. The ninth study reported results for post-menopausal breast cancer only. For overall risk of breast cancer, the pooled relative risk from the eight studies was 1.06 (95% CI 1.01-1.11) (Figure 3). The funnel plot was reasonably symmetrical with one small study outlier (Supplementary Figure 2a). Both Egger's (p=0.141) and Begg's (p=0.108) tests were non-significant indicating no significant publication bias. Overall there was medium level heterogeneity (I^2 61.5%) that was statistically significant (p=0.011).

The pooled relative risk for pre-menopausal breast cancer, from the five relevant studies, was 0.99 (95% CI 0.88-1.10) (Figure 3). Both Begg's (p=1.000) and Egger's (p=0.662) tests were non-significant and the funnel plot was symmetrical with one small study outlier (Supplementary Figure 2b). The level of heterogeneity was medium (I^2 39.5%) and not statistically significant (p=0.158). The six relevant studies produced a pooled relative risk for post-menopausal breast cancer of 1.09 (95% CI 1.03-1.15) (Figure 3). Both Begg's (p=0.348) and Egger's (p=0.570) tests were non-significant and the funnel plot was symmetrical with one small study outlier (Supplementary Figure 2c). Overall there was medium heterogeneity (I^2 40.2%) that was not statistically significant (p=0.137).

4. Discussion

Among the 262,195 women in UK Biobank, those who consumed processed meat were at higher risk of breast cancer; independent of sociodemographic, lifestyle, obesity, and dietary factors included in this study. Our results and the meta-analysis suggested the overall association is largely driven by the risk of post-menopausal breast cancer. Red meat consumption was not a risk factor for breast cancer in UK Biobank, after adjusting for confounding; nor in the meta-analysis.

A number of possible underlying mechanisms have been mooted [18]. Processed meat contains high levels of amines, and nitrate and nitrite are commonly added to enhance colour and flavour. All are precursors of N-nitroso compounds which are carcinogenic. The added nitrate together with the heme iron present in red meat enhances endogenous N-nitroso compound formation [17], whereas antioxidants inhibit it [19]. In a randomized controlled trial, consumption of processed meat (HR 2.46; 95%CI 1.28–4.72) and dietary heme (HR 2.80, 95% CI 1.42, 5.54) were both associated with breast cancer in the control arm, but not in the intervention arm which was given low-dose anti-oxidants [16,19]. A recent study has implicated the high content of N-glycolylneuraminic acic, an animal sugar, as a possible cause of chronic inflammation and tumour formation [20].

The mechanism most extensively studied has been the possible role of cooking. Cooking red meat can produce carcinogenic compounds such as heterocyclic amines and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons [21]. The likelihood of carcinogens being formed varies according to the method, temperature and duration of cooking. In a case-control study of 2,386 women with breast cancer and 1,703 healthy controls, there was an overall association between red meat consumption and breast cancer. However, on sub-group analysis the association was significant in women using high temperature cooking methods (OR 1.5, 95% 1.3-1.9, $p<0.001$) but not those using other cooking methods (OR 1.1, 95% CI 0.9-1.3, $p=0.429$) [21]. A recent

study found that high intake of smoked meats, that are high in polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, was associated with mortality from breast cancer [23].

Because UK Biobank participants are not representative of the general population, summary statistics such as disease frequency cannot be generalized; however, estimates of effect size can [24]. Repeated 24-hour dietary recall questionnaires are generally more accurate than food frequency questionnaires, but take longer to complete, and were only available on a minority of UK Biobank participants. Therefore, our study used data from the self-completed food frequency questionnaire; the usual methodology adopted in large-scale studies. To date, there has been no internal validation of the food frequency data within the UK Biobank population. Participants who completed the Oxford WebQ were more likely to be female, white, older, more affluent and better educated compared to the rest of UK Biobank participants, which may have introduced response bias. Breast cancer was ascertained through a combination of hospital admission, cancer registry and death certificate data; therefore, it should be reasonably complete and selection bias unlikely. We were able to adjust for a wide range of confounders including sociodemographic, lifestyle and dietary factors; however, residual confounding is possible in any observational study. Whilst there was some evidence of a possible dose relationship, the largest increase in risk of breast cancer was between zero and low intake (4g/day) of processed meat. Women who ate no processed meat may differ in other, unmeasured, ways or may have changed their diet as a result of ill-health. In order to check for potential reverse causation, we repeated the analyses using landmark analyses and the results were similar. A limitation of our study was the inability to determine whether the associations varied according to the hormonal receptor status of tumours, due to lack of these data in UK Biobank. Our meta-analysis was the largest to date, including data on 40,257 incident cancers in over 1.6 million women from 11 independent cohorts. A limitation of our meta-analysis was the inconsistent approaches adopted by the individual studies in the number and range of confounders they included; therefore, we used a random effects approach to allow for differences in effect size between different study populations.

We obtained a similar pooled estimate as Guo et al. for processed meat consumption [6] but a non-significant pooled estimate for red meat consumption. The latter is due to our meta-analysis employing stricter inclusion criteria and methodology. We included only cohort studies; did not include duplicate information from repeat studies on the same cohort; included only estimates based on comparisons of the highest and lowest intake categories, excluded estimates based on increments in intake; included only evaluations of red meat and processed meat intake; and excluded studies that analysed total meat consumption or only selected types of red meat, such as beef. In comparison, the most recently published meta-analysis, by Guo et al., included three nested case-control studies [25-27] as well as cohort studies, and treated odds ratios as equivalent to relative risks [26,27]. One of the nested case-control studies produced atypically high estimates of the associations but these were derived from a study population with much higher levels of meat consumption in the highest category than our UK Biobank study. Guo et al. also included two studies that were undertaken on the same cohort as two other included studies [15,28]. Furthermore, they included a study on 6,156 women who participated in the National Health Epidemiologic Follow-up Study, which compared women according to beef, rather than total red meat, intake [29]. Therefore, the groups reporting no and low beef intake will have included women who consumed other forms of red meat; such as pork, lamb and game. Because of our tighter inclusion criteria, the heterogeneity of the studies included in our meta-analysis was lower than those included in the meta-analysis conducted by Guo et al: I^2 for red meat 44.0% versus 62.2%.

A previous meta-analysis based on estimates of incremental intake of red and processed meat conducted by the World Cancer Research fund reported similar findings to this study [30]. They found that there was no association between red meat intake and breast cancer, while the pooled relative risk for 50g/day intake of processed meat and post-menopausal breast cancer was 1.13, 95% CI 0.99-1.29.

In conclusion, high consumption of processed meat was associated with higher overall risk of breast cancer; but this association was driven by post-menopausal breast cancer. After taking account of confounding, red meat consumption was not associated with an overall risk of breast cancer either in UK Biobank or the meta-analysis.

Conflict of interest statement

JPP and NS are members of the UK Biobank steering committee. These facts had no bearing on the study. Otherwise the authors have declared that no competing interests, including financial interests, exist.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to UK Biobank participants. This research has been conducted using the UK Biobank Resource under Application Number 7155. This work was supported by the Glasgow University Paterson Endowment Fund. The funders of the study had no role in study design, data collection, data analysis, data interpretation or writing of the report.

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[Tables and figures including titles and legends]

Table 1. Demographic, lifestyle and dietary characteristics of female UK Biobank participants according to whether or not they developed breast cancer

	No breast cancer	**Breast cancer**	**P value***
	N=257,376	N=4,819	
	N (%)	N (%)	
Ethnic group			
White	242,024 (94.5)	4,621 (96.3)	<0.001
Asian	4,414 (1.7)	58 (1.2)	
Black	4,519 (1.8)	42 (0.9)	
Other	5,206 (2.0)	76 (1.6)	
Missing	1,213	22	
Smoking status			
Never	153,066 (59.8)	2,774 (54.8)	0.002
Former	79,787 (31.2)	1,609 (33.6)	
Current	23,090 (9.0)	413 (8.6)	
Missing	1,433	23	
Physical activity			
Inactive	124,496 (48.4)	2,440 (50.6)	0.002
Active	132,880 (51.6)	2,379 (49.4)	
Missing	0	0	
Alcohol frequency			
Never	41,104 (16.0)	905 (16.7)	0.017
Special occasions	52,595 (20.5)	1,069 (22.2)	
1-2/month	66,088 (25.8)	1,209 (25.2)	
1-2/week	33,561 (13.1)	608 (12.7)	
3-4/week	38,734 (15.1)	686 (14.3)	
Daily	24,586 (9.6)	431 (9.0)	
Missing	708	11	
Cooked vegetables (spoons/day)			
0	6,444 (2.5)	117 (3.0)	0.528
1	35,749 (14.1)	663 (13.9)	
2	87,239 (34.3)	1,645 (34.5)	
3	72,735 (28.6)	1,361 (28.5)	
4	28,167 (11.1)	563 (11.8)	
≥5	24,133 (9.5)	425 (8.9)	
Missing	2,909	45	
Raw Vegetables (spoons/day)			
0	18,097 (7.1)	385 (8.1)	0.048
1	80,302 (31.6)	1,545 (32.3)	
2	64,216 (25.3)	1,187 (24.9)	
3	40,895 (16.1)	766 (16.0)	
4	21,855 (8.6)	398 (8.3)	

≥5	28,839 (11.3)	496 (10.4)	
Missing	3172	42	
Bread			
Brown/Wholemeal	178,913 (73.8)	3,374 (73.9)	0.828
White/Other	63,570 (26.2)	1,190 (26.1)	
Missing	14,893	255	
Red meat (g/day)			
0	22,059 (8.7)	376 (7.9)	<0.001
1-19	116,675 (45.9)	2,069 (43.6)	
19-25	42,869 (16.7)	858 (18.1)	
>25	72,539 (28.5)	1,477 (30.5)	
Missing	3,234	69	
Processed meat (g/day)			
0	32,456 (12.7)	521 (10.9)	0.023
1-4	99,269 (38.7)	1,875 (39.1)	
5-9	70,313 (27.4)	1,393 (29.0)	
>9	54,268 (21.2)	1,011 (21.1)	
Missing	1,070	19	
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	
Age	56.2 (8.0)	57.6 (7.6)	
Missing	0	0	
Deprivation Index		-1.5 (3.0)	<0.001
Missing	313	3	
Body mass index (kg/m^2)	27.1 (5.2)	27.6 (5.1)	<0.001
Missing	4,818	87	

Note.* t-test for age, BMI and fibre intake; Mann-Whitney U for deprivation index; χ2 test for sex, ethnic group and type of bread; χ2 test for trend for smoking and intake of alcohol, meat and vegetables

N number; BMI body mass index

Table 2. Cox proportional hazard models of the risk of breast cancer associated with red and processed meat consumption

	Univariate			Multivariable*			Multivariable**			Multivariable***		
	HR	**95% CI**	**P value**	**HR**	**95% CI**	**P value**	**HR**	**95% CI**	**P value**	**HR**	**95% CI**	**P value**
Red meat (g/day)												
		N=258,892	0.008		N=257,876	0.177		N=252,309	0.622		N=235,233	0.431
0	1			1			1			1		
<19	1.04	0.93-1.16	0.511	0.99	0.89-1.11	0.885	0.96	0.86-1.08	0.528	0.96	0.85-1.08	0.469
19-25	1.12	1.00-1.27	0.064	1.06	0.93-1.12	0.395	1.02	0.90-1.16	0.747	1.02	0.90-1.16	0.738
>25	1.12	1.00-1.25	0.058	1.04	0.93-1.16	0.537	0.99	0.88-1.11	0.828	0.99	0.88-1.12	0.914
Processed meat (g/day)												
		N=261,106	0.001		N=260,064	<0.001		N=254,356	0.002		N=236,876	0.005
0	1			1			1			1		
<4	1.17	1.07-1.30	0.001	1.15	1.05-1.28	0.003	1.15	1.04-1.27	0.006	1.15	1.04-1.28	0.007
4-9	1.22	1.11-1.35	<0.001	1.21	1.09-1.33	<0.001	1.19	1.07-1.32	0.001	1.19	1.07-1.33	0.002
>9	1.22	1.10-1.36	<0.001	1.23	1.10-1.36	<0.001	1.21	1.09-1.35	0.001	1.21	1.08-1.35	0.001

Note. *adjusted for age, deprivation and ethnic group, **also adjusted for smoking, alcohol, body mass index and physical activity, ***also adjusted for consumption of cooked and raw vegetables and type of bread; HR hazard ratio; CI confidence interval; N number

Table 3. Characteristics of the cohort studies included in the meta-analysis

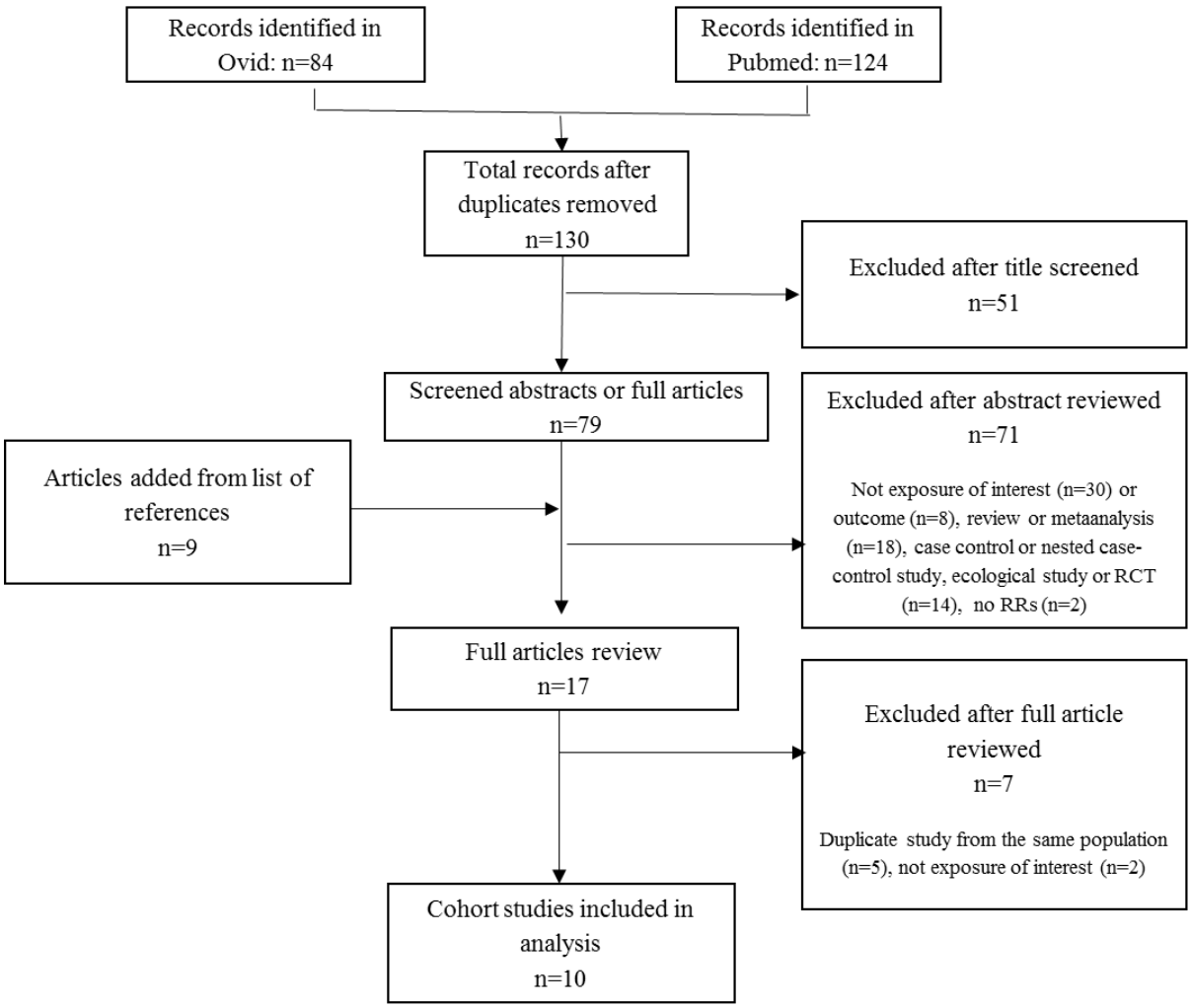
Reference	Country	Cohort	Participants		Exposure details		Follow up (Years)	Breast cancer		Result		
			Age (years)	N		Intake		N	Type	RR	Lower CI	Upper CI
Holmes et al (2003)												
	USA	NHS	30-55	88,647	red meat	≥1.32 serving/day	18	4,107	overall	0.94	0.84	1.05
		NHS			processed meat	≥0.46 serving/day			overall	0.94	0.85	1.05
		NHS			red meat				post-menopausal	0.99	0.86	1.13
		NHS			processed meat				post-menopausal	1	0.88	1.13
		NHS			red meat				pre-menopausal	0.94	0.72	1.22
		NHS			processed meat				pre-menopausal	0.86	0.67	1.09
Cross et al (2007)												
	USA	NIH AARP	50 - 71	494,036	red meat	62.7 g/1,000kcal	8.2	5,872	overall	1.02	0.93	1.12
		NIH AARP			processed meat	22.6 g/1,000kcal			overall	1.03	0.94	1.12
Taylor et al (2007)												
	UK	UK WCS	35 - 69	33,725	red meat	>57 g/day	8	678	overall	1.41	1.11	1.81
		UK WCS			processed meat	>20 g/day			overall	1.39	1.09	1.78
		UK WCS			red meat				post-menopausal	1.56	1.09	2.23
		UK WCS			processed meat				post-menopausal	1.64	1.14	2.37
		UK WCS			red meat				pre-menopausal	1.32	0.93	1.88
		UK WCS			processed meat				pre-menopausal	1.2	0.85	1.7
Ferucci et al (2009)												

USA	PLCOCST	55-74	52,158	red meat	52.8 g/1,000kcal	5.5	1,205	overall	1.23	1	1.51
	PLCOCST			processed meat	16.9 g/1,000kcal			overall	1.12	0.92	1.36
Larsson et al (2009)											
Swedish	Swedish MC	40 - 71	61,433	red meat	≥98 g/day	17.4	2,952	overall	0.98	0.86	1.12
Pala et al (2009)											
Europe	EPIC	25 - 75	319,826	red meat	84.6 g/day	8.8	7,119	overall	1.06	0.98	1.14
				processed meat	56.5 g/day			overall	1.1	1	1.2
	EPIC			red meat				post-menopausal	1.05	0.94	1.18
				processed meat				post-menopausal	1.13	1	1.28
	EPIC			red meat				pre-menopausal	0.94	0.8	1.1
				processed meat				pre-menopausal	0.99	0.82	1.19
Genkinger et al (2013)											
USA	BWHS	21 - 69	52,062	red meat	≥400 g/week	12	1,268	overall	1.02	0.83	1.24
				processed meat	≥200 g/week			overall	0.99	0.82	1.2
	BWHS			red meat				post-menopausal	0.86	0.62	1.2
				processed meat				post-menopausal	0.93	0.69	1.27
	BWHS			red meat				pre-menopausal	1.01	0.78	1.3
				processed meat				pre-menopausal	0.92	0.72	1.18
Farvid et al (2014)											
USA	NHSII	33 - 52	88,803	red meat	1.50 serving/day	20	2,830	overall	1.22	1.06	1.4
	NHSII			red meat				post-menopausal	1.23	0.96	1.57
	NHSII			red meat				pre-menopausal	1.12	0.93	1.35

Pouchieu et al (2014)											
France	SUWIMAX		2,367	red meat	>63.7 g/day	11.3	102	overall	1.01	0.58	1.74
	SUWIMAX			processed meat	>43.5 g/day			overall	2.46	1.28	4.72
Inoue-Choi et al (2016)											
USA	NIH AARP	62 (5.3)	193,742	red meat	43.4 g/1,000kcal	9.4	9,305	post-menopausal	1.03	0.96	1.11
	NIH AARP			processed meat	14.5 g/1,000kcal			post-menopausal	1.09	1.01	1.17
Anderson et al (2017)											
UK	UK Biobank	40-69	262,195	red meat	37.8 g/day	7	4,819	overall	0.99	0.88	1.12
								post-menopausal	0.95	0.82	1.1
								pre-menopausal	1.09	0.85	1.4
				processed meat	20.2 g/day			overall	1.21	1.08	1.35
								post-menopausal	1.2	1.05	1.37
								pre-menopausal	1.32	1.03	1.69

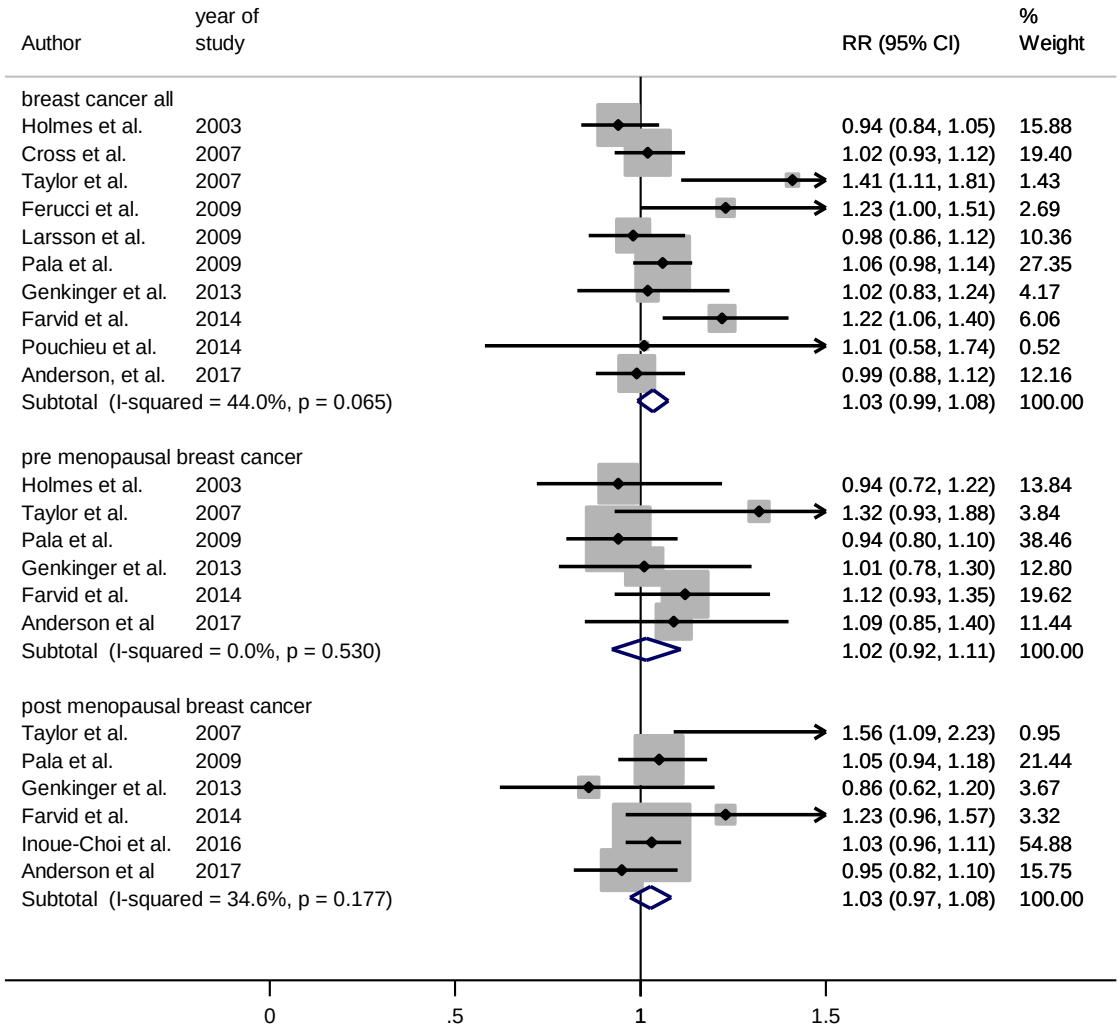
Note. N number; RR relative risk; CI confidence interval; USA United States of America; NHS Nurses Health Study; NIH National Institutes of Health; AARP American Association for Retired Persons; UK United Kingdom; WCS Women's Cohort Study; PLCOCST Prostate, Lung, Colorectal, Ovarian Cancer Screening Trial; SU.VI.MAX Supplementation enVitamines et Mineraux Antioxydants; BWHS Black Women's Health Study; EPIC European Prospective Investigation into Cancer and Nutrition; Swedish MC The Swedish Mammography Cohort. Referent category: Taylor et al (2007) and Anderson et al (2017) zero intake; otherwise zero/lowest intake (i.e. lowest intake category including zero intake).

Figure1. PRISMA flow chart of study selection process



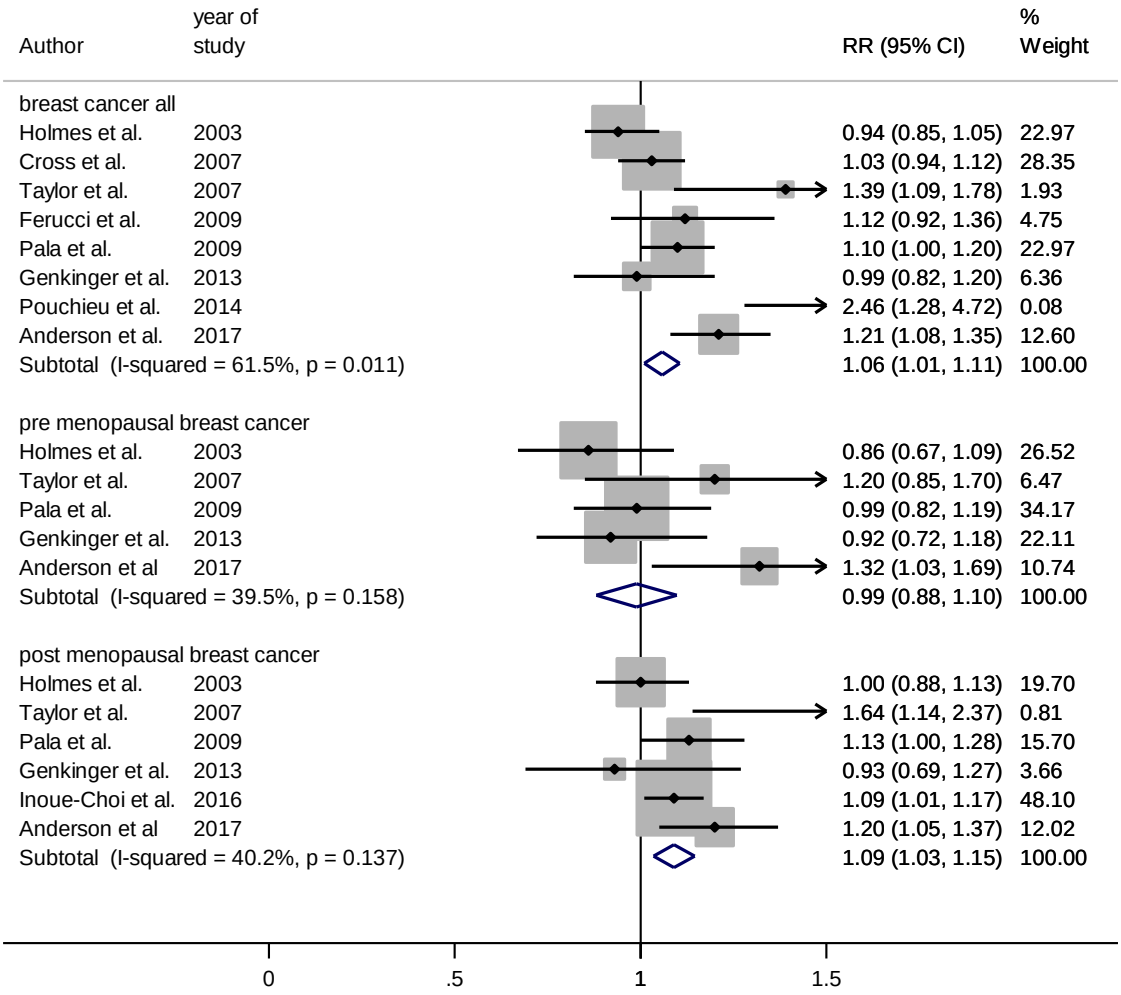
Note. Presented according to PRISMA guidelines

Figure 2. Forest plot of cohort studies examining the association between red meat intake and breast cancer.



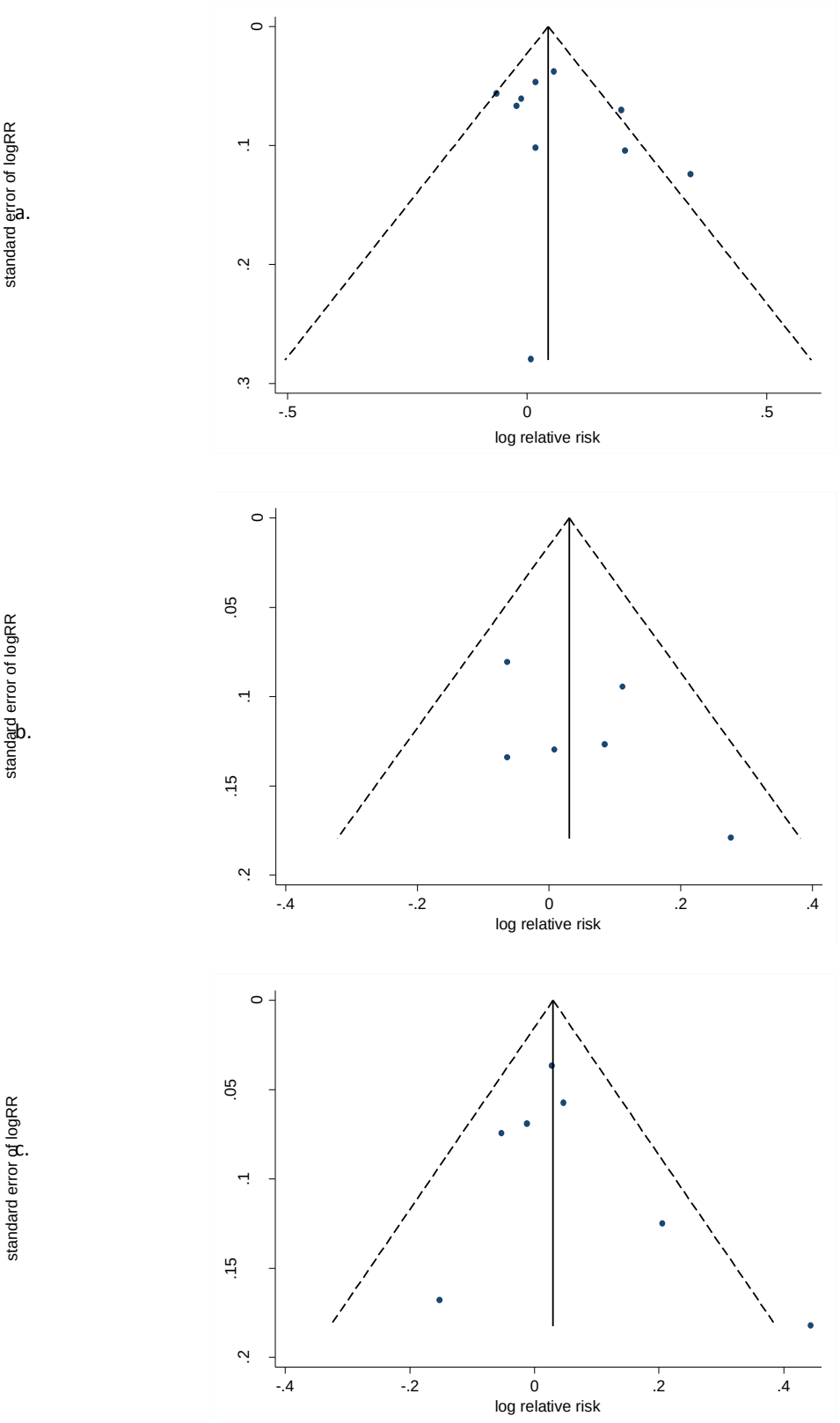
RR relative risk; CI confidence interval

Figure 3. Forest plot of cohort studies examining the association between processed meat intake and breast cancer.



RR relative risk; CI confidence interval

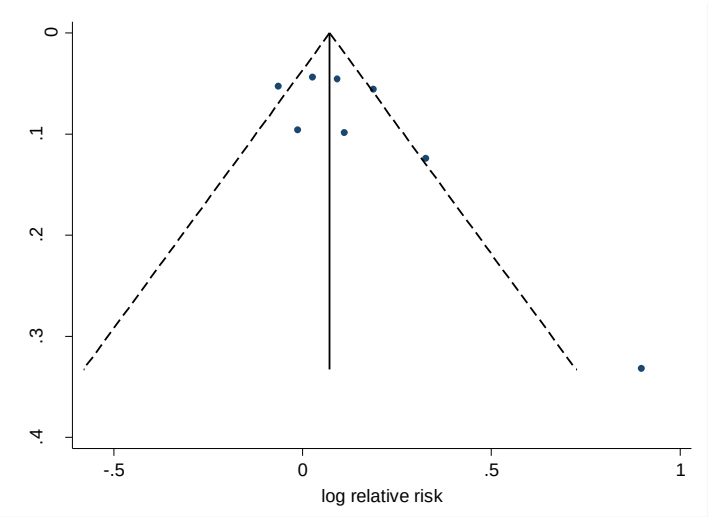
Supplementary Figure 1. Funnel plot of cohort studies examining the association between red meat intake and breast cancer. a. overall breast cancer; b. pre-menopausal breast cancer; c. post-menopausal breast cancer



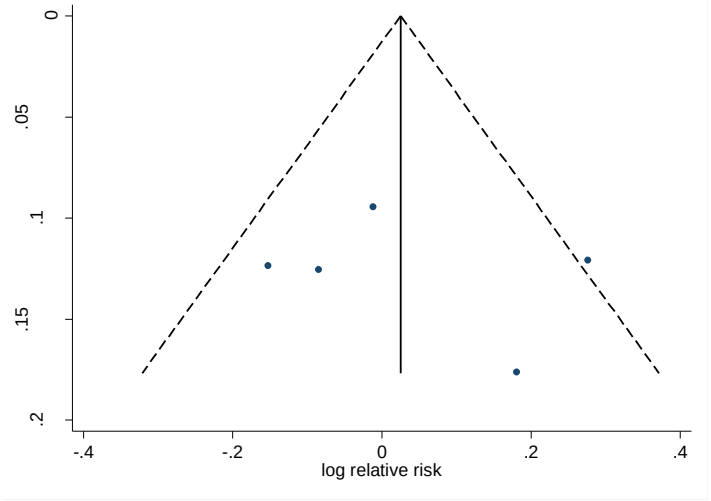
RR relative risk

Supplementary Figure 2. Funnel plots of cohort studies examining association between processed meat intake and breast cancer. a. overall breast cancer; b. pre-menopausal breast cancer; c. post-menopausal breast cancer

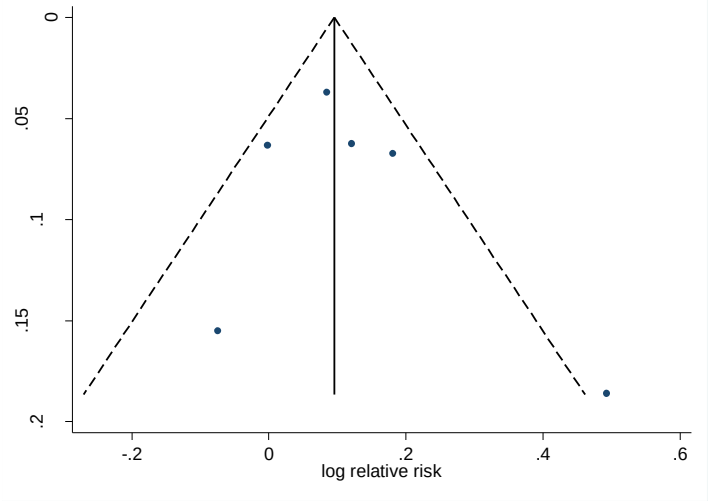
a.



b.



c.



RR relative risk

Supplementary Table 1. Cox proportional hazard models of the risk of breast cancer associated with red and processed meat consumption using Tertile 1 as the referent category.

	Univariate			Multivariable*			Multivariable**			Multivariable***		
	HR	**95% CI**	**P value**	**HR**	**95% CI**	**P value**	**HR**	**95% CI**	**P value**	**HR**	**95% CI**	**P value**
Red meat (g/day)												
		N=258,892	0.319		N=257,876	0.345		N=252,309	0.418		N=235,233	0.271
0	0.96	0.86-1.08	0.511	1.01	0.90-1.13	0.885	1.04	0.93-1.16	0.528	1.04	0.93-1.17	0.469
<19	1			1			1			1		
19-25	1.08	1.00-1.17	0.055	1.06	0.98-1.15	0.133	1.06	0.98-1.15	0.170	1.07	0.98-1.16	0.125
>25	1.08	1.01-1.15	0.034	1.05	0.98-1.12	0.199	1.02	0.96-1.10	0.510	1.04	0.97-1.11	0.315
Processed meat (g/day)												
		N=261,106	0.038		N=260,064	0.140		N=254,356	0.156		N=236,876	0.155
0	0.85	0.77-0.93	0.001	0.86	0.78-0.95	0.003	0.87	0.79-0.96	0.006	0.87	0.78-0.96	0.007
<4	1			1			1			1		
4-9	1.04	0.97-1.11	0.308	1.04	0.97-1.12	0.254	1.03	0.96-1.10	0.418	1.03	0.96-1.11	0.371
>9	1.04	0.96-1.12	0.356	1.05	0.98-1.14	0.138	1.05	0.97-1.14	0.201	1.04	0.96-1.13	0.294