

**BREAKING NEWS FROM** the International Agency for Research on Cancer, part of the World Health Organization (WHO), reports that processed meats are carcinogenic to humans. Processed meats such as bacon, sausage, hot dogs, salami, corned beef, beef jerky, canned meat (like SPAM), and ham were classified as Group 1 carcinogens. Other Group 1 carcinogens include asbestos, the ethanol in alcohol, arsenic, oral contraceptives, and tobacco. Being a Group 1 carcinogen does not mean that these substances are each equally dangerous, that it causes the most serious cancers, or has the largest risk. It is a statement of confirmation that it is a carcinogen to humans. As a contrast, red meat is classified in Group 2A, meaning that it is

probably carcinogenic to humans. The WHO stated this after 22 experts from 10 countries analyzed decades of research.

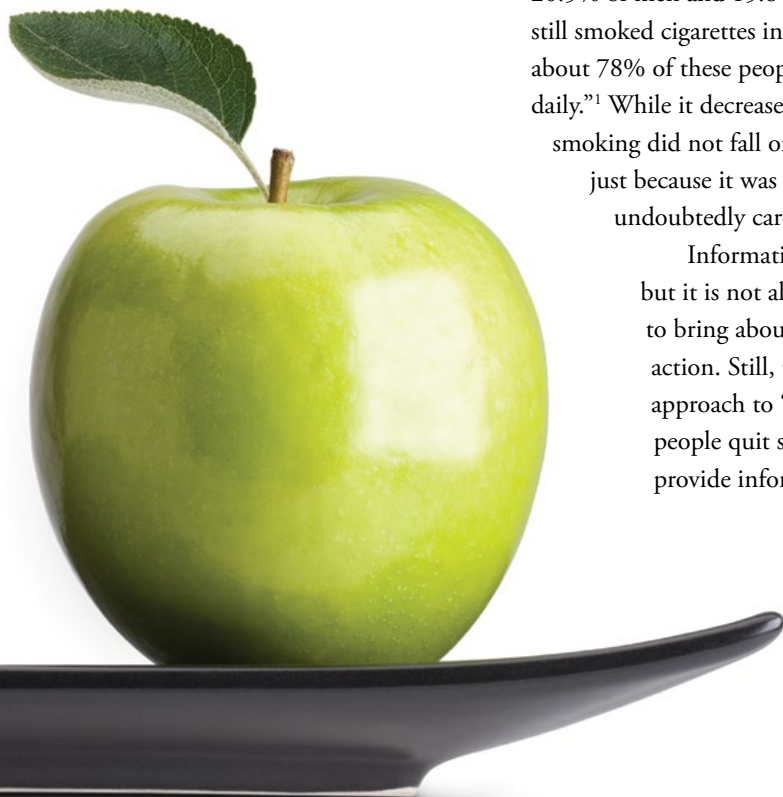
So what do you think? How will this statement from the WHO impact the consumption of processed meat? How much less processed meat will the average American eat as a result of this information?

The WHO made an association between processed meat and colorectal cancer, the third leading cause of cancer in America. Lung cancer is the first leading cause of cancer. The association between tobacco and lung cancer has been clearly established. As a result, "Cigarette use has declined dramatically since the release of the first US Surgeon General's Report on Smoking and Health in 1964. Even so, about 20.5% of men and 15.8% of women still smoked cigarettes in 2012, with about 78% of these people smoking daily."<sup>1</sup> While it decreased, cigarette smoking did not fall off the planet just because it was found to be undoubtedly carcinogenic.

Information is vital, but it is not always enough to bring about change and action. Still, the typical approach to "helping" people quit smoking is to provide information. We

tend to think that if people only knew that processed meats or tobacco cause cancer they would stop eating hot dogs and smoking. But does this approach work? Hospitals and churches alike offer behavior change approaches, yet this approach alone often has little impact. Consider the reality that "when healthcare systems offer action-oriented smoking cessation clinics for free, the percentage of eligible smokers who participate annually is only 1%."<sup>2</sup>

In order for action-oriented endeavors to be helpful, people must be ready for change. Research and observation of humans has found that people move through a series of five stages in the pathway of making change. The first stage is Precontemplation. An individual in this stage is not intending to take action. They may be unaware of the negative consequences of their behavior or these consequences are insignificant to them. They may feel demoralized or defensive. Contemplation is the second stage. In this stage, benefits of change are recognized, but ambivalence still exists to some degree. They may feel unable to change or that change is too difficult and not worth the effort. The third stage is Preparation, which is experienced as the individual is intending to take action in the near future and is fostering mental and environmental readiness. They may feel a bit apprehensive and fearful of failure. In the Action stage, the individual is already quitting or making attempts towards their goals. Maintenance is the last stage.



Here strategies are in place to get back on track in case of regression. “Research comparing stage distribution across

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behaviors and populations find that only a minority of people are in Preparation with a majority in Precontemplation and Contemplation. Those data suggest that if we offered all individuals action-oriented interventions that assume readiness to practice a healthy behavior, we would be mis-serving the majority who are not prepared to take action.”<sup>3</sup> Action-oriented approaches only work for those who are in the Preparation or Action stages, but miss the majority of people who just aren’t there yet.

Oftentimes the first battle that must be tackled before undertaking a behavior change is against apathy. By apathy I am referring to a state of indifference, a lack of drive or motivation, being insensible, listless, complacent, even sluggish. Many have great drive in one area of their lives but are completely apathetic in another. Fight is approaching life with intention, focus, drive, decision, and yes, even passion. I believe fight can be developed and can be contagious.

I recently listened to a TEDMED talk where Mark Hyman, M.D., points out that more people are overweight on our planet than are starving; that we live in a world where there will be half a billion diabetics and nearly a billion pre-diabetics soon. What is the answer? Amazingly, he proposed that rebuilding

community and connection could be the key to solving these problems. Sociogenomics is a new word created

to encapsulate the impact that social networks have on health, disease, and gene expression. Could altering sociogenomics

have an impact on facilitating change, overcoming apathy, and enhancing health?

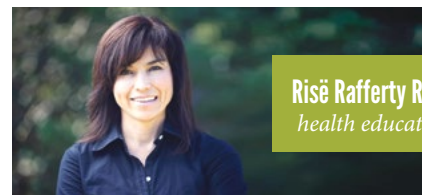
Dr. Hyman, a Jewish functional medicine physician, collaborated with Rick Warren, a Christian pastor, and Muslim psychiatrist Daniel Amen, M.D., to produce *The Daniel Plan*. For those of us familiar with the story of Daniel and his three friends, found in Daniel 1, the Daniel plan of Scripture is nothing new. However, a focus of this program that they developed, aside from lifestyle change, is that it is conducted in small groups. Hyman shares that in the first week of launching the program 15,000 people signed up. In one year, 250,000 pounds were lost. Behavior changed by using community and positive peer pressure. Those who worked the program together lost twice as much weight as those who did it on their own. The community became part of the cure. Friendship helped to develop focus, fight, and follow through.

Printed in a 1949 Singer sewing machine manual are these words. “Prepare yourself mentally for sewing. Think about what you are going to do . . . Never approach sewing with a sigh or lackadaisically. Good results are difficult when indifference dominates.”<sup>4</sup> How true. In reality, apathy promotes

stress, depression, and feelings of defeat. It may at first seem like the easy way, but in reality its effects are very hard to live with and the results aren’t that great.

The apostle Paul believed in fight. He stated, “Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air” (1 Corinthians 9:26). He was not aimless or purposeless. His advice to Timothy to “fight the good fight of faith” (1 Timothy 6:12), is an excellent example of community inspiring each other to fight. Small groups who won’t push or prescribe, but rather inspire, encourage, and support with empathy and understanding, who come along beside, working together for a common goal, may be just what many need to help them move from one stage of change to the next and be able to exclaim with Paul, “I have fought a good fight” (2 Timothy 4:7).

1. "Tobacco-Related Cancers Fact Sheet," American Cancer Society, 2/21/14, <http://www.cancer.org/cancer/cancercauses/tobaccocancer/tobacco-related-cancer-fact-sheet>.
2. Edward Leyton, M.D., "The Healing Relationship," *Textbook of Functional Medicine, Institute for Functional Medicine*, 2010, p. 722-723, <https://www.functionalmedicine.org/files/library/chapter-36.pdf>.
3. Ibid., p. 723.
4. <http://www.snopes.com/history/document/sewing.asp>.



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Risë has been writing on various health subjects for over 20 years. She has inspired many through her research and down-to-earth writing and speaking style. She believes that healthy living is intimately tied to happiness and wholeness.