

How Organic Meat Can Protect You from Getting Sick

Source: *MSN Health & Fitness*



Normally, if you get sick with *E. coli*—a common cause of food poisoning and urinary tract infections—you can take an antibiotic, and in a few days, you're better. But that quick fix may soon become obsolete, as new research shows that some types of *E. coli* have begun to develop resistance to one of the world's "last resort" bacteria-killing drugs.

Researchers in China took bacterial samples from pig farms, pork, and humans to discover that, for the first time ever, certain strains of *E. coli* bacteria are resistant to an antibiotic called colistin.

In people, colistin has been used as a last resort when other treatments have failed, says study co-author Jim Spencer, PhD, senior lecturer at the School of Cellular and Molecular Medicine at the University of Bristol, because it typically has been effective against bacteria strains already resistant to other, newer drugs. Now, researchers say that could all change—and the strains likely aren't just isolated to China.

What to do to protect yourself? First, don't ask for antibiotic prescriptions every time you visit the doctor, especially for sicknesses like colds and the flu, which are usually caused by viruses and can't be cured by antibiotics. When you really do need them—for infections like strep throat, UTIs, and whooping cough—make sure to finish the entire course of pills.

Second, prioritize buying organic meat and dairy. While the risk of food poisoning from bugs like *E. coli* is similar in organic and conventional products, you're making a statement with your pocketbook that you don't support the use of unnecessary antibiotics in meat production, which accounts for 80 percent of antibiotic use in this country, according to the National Resources Defense Council. Many experts say conventional farming's reliance on antibiotics in meat and dairy production has helped increase the incidence of drug-resistant bacteria. Research also shows that organic meat is less likely to be contaminated with drug-resistant bacteria when you purchase it at the grocery store.

The USDA Organic seal ensures no antibiotics are used at all—if an organic animal gets sick and needs to be treated with antibiotics, it's not allowed to return to organic production after it gets better. The Certified Humane and Animal Welfare Approved labels are also good choices: They indicate that antibiotics are only used when animals are sick, never as a preemptive treatment.

