

Meat eaters — you are daredevils or dumb. Or both.

I am a vegetarian as well as my parents and all my family members. I've been a vegetarian for as long as I can remember. There have been times during my years of vegetarianism when I've wondered if I may indeed grow out of it. I've wondered if there might come a day when I'll put aside my childish aversion to the thought of dead stuff travelling through my intestines, like a corpse on a raft ride.

However, it could never happen, and not because I'm so enlightened, sensitive or any of the other euphemisms for "whining hippie" usually dumped on vegetarians. My conversion to flesh-eating couldn't happen because, frankly, I'm not stupid enough. As in, I can read.

Analysis of more than 6,000 pancreatic cancer cases published in the British Journal of Cancer says that eating just 50g of processed meat a day (one sausage or a couple of slices of bacon) raises the likelihood of pancreatic cancer by a fifth. 100 g a day (the equivalent of a medium burger) raises it by 38%, 150 g by 57%. Men are worst hit, as they tend to eat the most processed meat. And while pancreatic cancer is not the most common of cancers, it's frequently diagnosed late, with four-fifths of sufferers dying within a year of diagnosis.

It should be pointed out that this is about processed meat. However, many past studies have stated a probable link between too much meat and all manner of cancers and heart problems, as well as links to other conditions, from diabetes and high blood pressure to obesity and Alzheimer's.

If, by now, you're thinking that I'm out to shock you, then you couldn't be more wrong. I'd be shocked if any of this was considered new enough to shock anyone. This information has popped up regularly for years in all forms of popular media — newspapers and numerous TV and radio programs, to say nothing of the Internet. Indeed, in this era of info overload, if you've never come across the "burgers and kebabs are unhealthy" revelation, one would have to presume you've been lying in a coma.

Sympathy is in short supply these days. You can't move for people being blamed for their own miserable situations: smokers who "burden" the NHS; alcoholics who don't "deserve" liver transplants; obese people who "should" pay more for flights. By this logic, people who've been regularly informed of the dangers of meat, particularly the cheap processed variety, but who continue to wolf it down should be held just as accountable.

Yet if these meat eaters are mentioned at all, it's in general poor lifestyle terms, as an afterthought to drinking, smoking, and lack of exercise. You just don't get people making emotional pronouncements about bacon lovers not deserving cancer treatment or kebab fans burdening the NHS.

It's not as if they haven't been warned countless times about the dangers — how willfully ill-informed can people be? Or maybe they're just hard. In fact, when I say I'm not dumb enough to eat meat, I should probably add brave enough. With so much frightening information, so readily available for so long, the modern committed carnivore must have nerves of steel. And yet, we should admit it, meat eaters still predominate and even grow in number. Must all of them be deaf and blind, and immune to a general sense of self-safety?

Saying "sympathy is in short supply these days", the author means that...

1. ...people tend to blame sick people in their sickness.
2. ...meat eaters do not deserve her sympathy.
3. ...society neglects people who have problems.
4. ...overweight people should pay more.