



HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Heidi Montag is eating raw bison, animal organs. Is it safe?



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Key Points

Heidi Montag is making headlines for eating raw meat and animal organs to address her fertility issues.

There is limited evidence to support that consuming raw meat has health benefits.

Nutrition experts also caution that consuming uncooked animal meat is not only dangerous, but deadly.

Heidi Montag has a lot on her plate.

Over the last few weeks, "The Hills" star, 35, has made headlines for her eyebrow-raising diet: She's filmed herself eating bull testicles and raw liver in various Instagram videos, and most recently was photographed eating a raw bison heart out of a Ziploc bag.

Despite receiving backlash online, Montag defended her "breakfast of champions" as a way to address her ongoing fertility issues after undergoing surgery last August to have non-cancerous uterine polyps removed.

"I have been trying to get pregnant for over a year and a half, (so) I'm willing to try different things," she told People on Thursday. "It's a great source of nutrients! I have felt incredible on this diet. A lot more energy, clarity, increased libido and overall improvement on chronic pain I have had."

Eating raw meat isn't a particularly new phenomenon, as seen by cultural cuisines including sushi, carpaccio, ceviche, torisashi and steak tartare, which are typically prepared with high-quality hygiene and storage. But when it comes to pursuing this carnivorous diet at home, nutrition experts say it can be dangerous and even deadly.

"Raw meats contain a lot of pathogens and bacteria, and you'll be introducing all of these organisms into your system," warns Jeff Nelken, a food safety expert in Los Angeles. "Even raw cookie dough has gotten people sick, so I don't recommend playing Russian Roulette with anyone's health."

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Are there any health benefits to eating raw meat?

Montag, who has previously made headlines for saying she died for a minute" after getting ten cosmetic surgeries in a 24-hour span in 2009, said eating raw animal organs has helped her "preserve as many nutrients as possible" — which may be true for some.

"When you cook things, you lose some vitamins and minerals like Vitamin C or water-soluble nutrients," explains Lisa Young, a registered dietitian nutritionist and author of "Finally Full, Finally Slim." "So proponents may feel you're not losing the nutrients and getting it all in when consuming raw meat."

Though some say raw meat has posed health benefits for the skin or for reproductive health, there is limited evidence to support these claims. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "raw foods of animal origin" carry harmful bacteria such as Salmonella, Shigella and E. Coli, which are only killed through cooking.

"Primarily, raw meat can have any bacteria on it, and they can either make you sick or, depending on your physical condition, can jeopardize your life" says Nelken, who adds that it can be particularly dangerous for elderly people or those with pre-existing conditions like high blood pressure or cardiovascular disease.

Though experts heavily advise against it, Young says it's important to consult a physician and purchase raw meat from a high-quality vendor for those considering it.

"If you compare it to something like sushi, you always want to make sure you get sushi from a very reliable source. The same rule applies if you're going to eat raw bison or animal meat," she says.

"If something is undercooked or uncooked, you're running a greater risk for contamination or food poisoning. Why risk it?"

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