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Program on Breast Cancer and Environmental Risk Factors

SPRECHER
INSTITUTE
for Comparative
Cancer Research

Diet and Nutrition

Frequently Asked Questions

■ Question

Is bovine growth hormone (bGH) a health concern in meat or dairy foods?

■ Answer

Bovine growth hormone (bGH or sometimes rBST) is not used in livestock raised for beef. Dairy cattle are not usually slaughtered for meat for human consumption. These two points make meat and beef products unlikely food sources of bGH for humans.

The bGH used in dairy cattle to enhance milk production is a growth hormone for cows but not for humans. The bGH is not recognized as a growth hormone by human cells. Also, the bGH is a protein that is broken down into smaller fragments (peptides and amino acids) during digestion. So people who drink milk from bGH treated cows should break down bGH when they digest the milk.

While short-term studies have not indicated other effects of bGH (allergies or other effects), more long-term studies on possible effects of bGH are needed. We have written a fact sheet that addresses consumer concerns about the use of growth promoters and hormones in livestock and dairy cattle. Please see Fact Sheet 37 ["Consumer Concerns about Hormones in Food"](#).

Answered by: [Suzanne Snedeker, Ph.D.](#)

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[Return to main list](#)

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