Dietary Protein Intake and Coronary Heart Disease in a Large Community Based Cohort: Results from the Atherosclerosis Risk in Communities (ARIC) Study

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Abstract

**Background:** Prospective data examining the relationship between dietary protein intake and incident coronary heart disease (CHD) are inconclusive. Most evidence is derived from homogenous populations such as health professionals. Large community-based analyses in more diverse samples are lacking.

**Methods:** We studied the association of protein type and major dietary protein sources and risk for incident CHD in 12,066 middle-aged adults (aged 45–64 at baseline, 1987–1989) from four U.S. communities enrolled in the Atherosclerosis Risk in Communities (ARIC) Study who were free of diabetes mellitus and cardiovascular disease at baseline. Dietary protein intake was assessed at baseline and after 6 years of follow-up by food frequency questionnaire. Our primary outcome was adjudicated coronary heart disease events or deaths with following up through December 31, 2010. Cox proportional hazard models with multivariable adjustment were used for statistical analyses.

**Results:** During a median follow-up of 22 years, there were 1,147 CHD events. In multivariable analyses total, animal and vegetable protein were not associated with an increased risk for CHD before or after adjustment. In food group analyses of major dietary protein sources, protein intake from red and processed meat, dairy products, fish, nuts, eggs, and legumes were not significantly associated with CHD risk. The hazard ratios [95% confidence intervals] for risk of CHD across quintiles of protein from poultry were 1.00 [ref], 0.83 [0.70–0.99], 0.93 [0.75–1.15], 0.88 [0.73–1.06], 0.79 [0.64–0.98], P for trend = 0.16. Replacement analyses evaluating the association of substituting one source of dietary protein for another or of decreasing protein intake at the expense of carbohydrates or total fats did not show any statistically significant association with CHD risk.

**Conclusion:** Based on a large community cohort we found no overall relationship between protein type and major dietary protein sources and risk for CHD.

Introduction

The relationship of dietary protein distinguished by animal versus vegetable origin with risk of coronary heart disease (CHD) has shown conflicting results [1,2,3,4,5,6]. This is surprising since the type of protein has been shown to influence cardiovascular risk factors such as hypertension [7,8,9,10,11,12]. Various observational studies [7,8,10,13] and feeding trials [9,11,12] have associated dietary protein of vegetable type inversely with blood pressure. To elucidate this apparent paradox, Bernstein et al. have focused on the effect of various food groups as major sources of dietary protein rather than on protein type in the Nurses’ Health Study [2]. Greater consumption of red meat or processed meat...
products was associated with a higher risk of CHD, while higher intakes of poultry, fish and nuts were associated with lower risk [2]. These findings are again in contrast with other results that showed no association of red meat with CHD [14] or that showed beneficial effects of animal protein on cardiovascular health [15,16]. The discordance in findings may be explained by several factors including research design and study populations. Large randomized controlled feeding trials on this topic are sparse and current evidence is mostly derived from observational studies which used nurses or health professionals as study populations [1,2,4,5]. Community based analyses are mostly missing [6,17]. Thus, conclusions regarding the relation of various sources of protein intake with cardiovascular health are difficult to draw. Analyses conducted in large general communities are warranted as these may provide greater exposure variability with more generalizable results.

In this study, we aimed to investigate the associations between total, animal, and plant-based dietary protein, as well as individual protein-rich food groups, and the risk for CHD in a large, community-based cohort of middle-aged adults. We hypothesized that intake of animal protein and proteins from processed meats would be associated with a higher risk of CHD and vegetable proteins and corresponding food groups with a lower CHD risk.

Methods

Study Population

The Atherosclerosis Risk in Communities Study (ARIC) is a community-based prospective cohort study of 15,792 middle-aged adults (aged 45–64 years at baseline) from four U.S. communities (Washington County, Md; Forsyth County, NC; Jackson, Miss; and suburbs of Minneapolis, Minn.) [18]. The first examination (visit 1) of participants occurred during 1987–1989, with three follow-up visits taking place each approximately every 3 years; response rates were 93%, 86%, and 81% at visits 2 (1990 to 1992), 3 (1993 to 1995), and 4 (1996 to 1998), respectively. A fifth examination (visit 5) took place in 2011–2013 among surviving participants. At all visits, participants received an extensive examination, including collection of medical, social, and demographic data [18]. For this analysis, only white and black adults were included; blacks from the Minneapolis and Washington County field centers were excluded due to small numbers. Individuals with self-reported diabetes, fasting blood glucose ≥126 mg/dL, non-fasting blood glucose ≥200 mg/dL or use of diabetes medication, a history of myocardial infarction, stroke, heart failure, coronary bypass surgery, angioplasty or with missing data on covariates of interest were excluded. Our final sample size included 12,066 persons.

The ARIC study was approved by the Institutional Review Boards (IRB) of all participating institutions, including the IRBs of the University of Minnesota, Johns Hopkins University, University of North Carolina, University of Mississippi Medical Center, and Wake Forest University. Written informed consent at each clinical site was obtained from all participants.

Assessment of protein intake

Protein intake was assessed using an interviewer-administered, 66-item food frequency questionnaire (FFQ) adapted from the 61-item FFQ developed by Willett et al. [19]. The FFQ was administered to all subjects at visit 1 at baseline (1987–1989) and at visit 3 (1993–1995). The usual frequency of food consumption was reported in 9 categories, from never or less than once a month to ≥6 times per day. The major contributors to protein intake included: unprocessed red meat, processed red meat, poultry, high-fat dairy, low-fat dairy, fish & seafood, eggs, nuts, and legumes. Average daily intake of nutrients was calculated by multiplying the frequency of consumption of each food item by its nutrient content and adding up the nutrient intake for all of the items. Vegetable protein intake was defined as the difference of total and animal protein intake. The residual method was used to adjust for total energy intake [20]. For assessing dietary behaviour, participants were divided into quintiles of cumulative average intake of various protein sources. Cumulative updating of the FFQ (i.e. visit 1 FFQ for follow-up between visit 1 and visit 3 and the average of visits 1 and 3 FFQ afterwards for those who attended both examinations, or visit 1 FFQ for those who did not attend visit 3) was used to reduce within-person variation and best represent long-term dietary behavior [2]. Participants with incomplete dietary information or with extreme calorie intake (<600 kcal or >4200 kcal per day for men, <500 kcal or >3600 kcal per day for women) were excluded from further analysis. We stopped updating a participant’s cumulative average intake when the participant of our study was diagnosed with an intermediate variable on the causal pathway between diet and CHD such as hypercholesterolemia, hypertension, stroke and diabetes. This was done to avoid exposure misclassification due to short-term changes in dietary patterns.

Assessment of coronary heart disease

The primary end point for this study was CHD occurring after the completion of the first FFQ (between 1987 and 1989). CHD was defined as a definite or probable myocardial infarction or a death from coronary heart disease. CHD events were identified and adjudicated using information from study visits, yearly telephone follow-up calls, review of hospital discharge lists and medical charts, death certificates, next-of-kin interviews, and physician-completed questionnaires [18,21]. Follow-up for CHD was available until December 31, 2010.

Covariates

Height, weight, and waist circumference were measured following a standardized protocol [18,21]. ARIC participants underwent fasting venipuncture at each examination [18]. Diabetes was defined as current use of glucose-lowering medications, fasting blood glucose ≥126 mg/dL, non-fasting blood glucose ≥200 mg/dL or self-reported history of diabetes. Hypertension was defined as the average of the last two of three blood-pressure readings at the first visit (using 140 mmHg or higher for systolic and 90 mmHg or higher for diastolic as cut-off points). Current smoking, ethanol intake, education, intake of antihypertensive or lipid lowering medication were derived from standardized questionnaires [18]. Sports-related physical activity and leisure related physical activity were assessed with the use of Baecke’s questionnaire and scoring systems [22].

Statistical Analysis

To assess the association of CHD and average cumulative intake of protein by quintiles, we calculated incidence rates (IR) of CHD events per 1000 person-years as the number of diagnosed cases of CHD occurring during the entire follow-up period divided by person-years of follow-up. Person-years of follow up were defined as time from the baseline examination to the date of the first coronary event, death, lost to follow-up, or December 31, 2010, whichever occurred earlier. Thereafter, corresponding rate ratios were calculated by dividing the rate among participants in each specific intake quintile by the rate among participants in the lowest quintile of intake (reference). Cox proportional hazards regression models were used to account for potential confounding. An initial model adjusted for age, race, sex, ARIC study center,
and total energy intake (minimally adjusted model). A second model additionally adjusted for smoking (current, former, never), pack years of smoking, education [less than high school, high school, more than high school], systolic blood pressure (mmHg), use of antihypertensive medication, HDLc (mmol/l), total cholesterol (mmol/l), use of lipid lowering medication, body mass index (kg/m²), waist-to-hip ratio, alcohol intake (g/week), Baecke’s physical activity score, leisure-related physical activity, carbohydrate intake (quintiles), fiber intake (quintiles), and magnesium intake (quintiles) (fully adjusted model). Median protein intake of each quintile (g/d) modeled as a continuous variable was used to test for linear trend.

We further conducted food substitution analyses based on the fully adjusted model. Hazard ratios of CHD associated with increasing 1 serving/day in the consumption of protein sources at the expense of decreasing 1 serving/day in a different protein source were calculated. Similarly, we conducted nutrient substitution analyses by examining the risk for CHD when increasing 10% energy from carbohydrates or fat while decreasing 10% of energy from protein. Tests of the proportional hazards assumption were evaluated. All p-values were 2-tailed. Data were analyzed with SAS 9.3 (SAS Corp, Cary, NC).

### Results

Baseline characteristics of the study participants according to quintiles of total protein intake at baseline are shown in Table 1. Compared with participants with low protein consumption, individuals with high protein consumption were less likely to be current smoker, to drink less alcohol per week, and more likely to conduct physical activity and to have graduated from high school. Furthermore, participants with high protein intake had higher BMI levels, higher intakes of fiber, magnesium and fat whereas decreased intake of carbohydrates.

During a median follow-up of 22 years, there were 1,147 CAD events among the 12,066 participants at baseline. In age, sex, race, study center and total energy adjusted analyses (minimally adjusted model) animal protein intake was not associated with an increased risk for CHD (Table 2). These results did not change significantly after full adjustment. In the minimally adjusted model, total and vegetable protein were associated with a significantly lower risk of CHD (Table 2, Model 1). This relationship was considerably attenuated and became non-significant after full adjustment (Table 2, Model 2).

In food-group analyses of major dietary protein sources using our minimally adjusted model, higher intake of red or processed meat was significantly associated with increased risk for CHD,
whereas low-fat dairy, poultry and nuts consumption were significantly associated with decreased risk for CHD (Table 3, Model 1). After adjustment for potential confounders, only higher intake of any other protein source was associated with non-significant lower risk of CHD (10–20% reduction per 1 serving/day change).

### Discussion

In this prospective community based study with 22 years of follow-up, neither total, animal or vegetable protein intake was associated with risk of CHD. In food group analyses of major dietary protein sources, we found no significant trend between various sizes of intake of meat products, poultry, dairy, eggs, nuts, fish, or legumes and risk for CHD. Our results are contrary to our initial hypothesis as we expected food groups based on animal protein nor vegetable protein to be significantly associated with lower risk of CHD (10–20% reduction per 1 serving/day change).

Results from the Health Professional Follow-up Study also indicate no association between dietary protein and risk of coronary heart disease after 18 years of follow-up [4]. In a later analysis of the Nurses’ Health Study spanning 26 years of follow-up higher intakes of red meat, red meat excluding processed meat, and high-fat dairy were indeed found to be significantly associated with an elevated risk of CHD while higher intakes of poultry, fish, and nuts were significantly associated with lower risk [2]. Other prospective studies using California Seventh Day Adventists or the NIH-AARP Diet and Health cohort as study base also report a positive association between (red) meat consumption and CHD risk [6,25]. Nonetheless, generalizability of the existing data is limited as the respective cohorts are characterized by well-educated, ethnically homogeneous study populations. A recent meta-analysis summarizing 9 studies on red and processed meat consumption and risk for CHD found processed meats (RR 1.42, 95%CI 1.07, 1.89), but not red meats (RR 1.00, 95% CI 0.81,1.23) to increase incident coronary events [14]. The effects of other dietary protein sources or type of protein were not addressed in this analysis. Moreover all included studies were observational and among included studies only one was based in a general community setting in the UK [17]. Interventional studies such as the BOLD Study suggest that dietary protein, also of animal origin, can exert positive effects on biomarkers of CHD [15,16]. Lean beef in an optimal lean diet has been shown to exhibit beneficial effects on systolic blood pressure and vascular elasticity [15,16].

In spite of the lack of strong epidemiologic evidence for an association between animal derived protein sources (in particular meat products) and risk for CHD, several arguments mainly based on contents of sodium and saturated fat have been previously made to potentially explain a harmful effect of animal derived protein products on the risk of CHD. Processed meats are known made to potentially explain a harmful effect of animal derived meat products) and risk for CHD, several arguments mainly based on contents of sodium and saturated fat have been previously made to potentially explain a harmful effect of animal derived protein sources (in particular meat products) and risk for CHD, several arguments mainly based on contents of sodium and saturated fat have been previously made to potentially explain a harmful effect of animal derived protein products on the risk of CHD. Processed meats are known

### Table 2. Association of total, animal and vegetal protein intake with coronary heart disease incidence, ARIC 1987–2010.

| Total Protein Intake | Q 1   | Q 2   | Q 3   | Q 4   | Q 5   | p-trend |
|----------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---------|
| Events, n            | 241   | 230   | 231   | 230   | 215   |         |
| Person-time          | 46149 | 46720 | 46725 | 46991 | 47102 |         |
| Incidence, per 1000 py | 5.2  | 4.9   | 4.9   | 4.9   | 4.6   |         |
| HR (95%CI)**         | 1 (ref) | 0.84 (0.70, 1.01) | 0.86 (0.72, 1.03) | 0.89 (0.74, 1.06) | 0.79 (0.66, 0.95) | 0.04 |
| HR (95%CI)**         | 1 (ref) | 0.91 (0.75, 1.11) | 0.93 (0.76, 1.14) | 1.00 (0.80, 1.24) | 0.84 (0.66, 1.07) | 0.34 |

### Animal Protein Intake

| Events, n            | 236   | 240   | 212   | 238   | 221   |         |
| Person-time          | 46175 | 46781 | 46915 | 47067 | 46750 |         |
| Incidence, per 1000 py | 5.1  | 5.1   | 4.5   | 5.1   | 4.7   |         |
| HR (95%CI)**         | 1 (ref) | 1.05 (0.88, 1.26) | 0.97 (0.80, 1.17) | 1.01 (0.84, 1.21) | 0.95 (0.79, 1.15) | 0.56 |
| HR (95%CI)**         | 1 (ref) | 1.16 (0.96, 1.40) | 1.01 (0.82, 1.24) | 1.11 (0.90, 1.37) | 1.00 (0.79, 1.26) | 0.94 |

### Vegetable Protein Intake

| Events, n            | 247   | 228   | 253   | 215   | 204   |         |
| Person-time          | 45991 | 46902 | 46518 | 47070 | 47207 |         |
| Incidence, per 1000 py | 5.4  | 4.9   | 5.4   | 4.6   | 4.3   |         |
| HR (95%CI)**         | 1 (ref) | 0.92 (0.77, 1.10) | 0.91 (0.76, 1.09) | 0.82 (0.68, 0.98) | 0.71 (0.59, 0.85) | 0.0001 |
| HR (95%CI)**         | 1 (ref) | 1.08 (0.89, 1.31) | 1.15 (0.94, 1.40) | 1.04 (0.84, 1.29) | 0.87 (0.68, 1.10) | 0.17 |

*adjusted for age, sex, race, study center, total energy intake.
** adjusted for age, sex, race, study center, total energy intake, smoking, education, systolic blood pressure, use of antihypertensive medication, HDLc, total cholesterol, use of lipid lowering medication, body mass index, waist-to-hip ratio, alcohol intake, sports-related physical activity, leisure-related physical activity, carbohydrate intake, fiber intake, and magnesium intake.

doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0109552.t002
Table 3. Association of major dietary protein sources with coronary heart disease, ARIC 1987–2010.

| Protein Intake | Q 1 | Q 2 | Q 3 | Q 4 | Q 5 | p-trend |
|----------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|---------|
| **Processed Meat** |     |     |     |     |     |         |
| Median svg/day | 0   | 0.1 | 0.4 | 0.5 | 1.1 |         |
| HR (95%CI)*     | 1 (ref) | 0.90 (0.74, 1.09) | 0.86 (0.72, 1.03) | 0.84 (0.70, 1.01) | 0.96 (0.77, 1.19) | 0.91 (0.74, 1.12) | 0.89 |
| HR (95%CI)**    | 1 (ref) | 0.92 (0.76, 1.22) | 0.88 (0.73, 1.06) | 0.83 (0.69, 0.99) | 0.96 (0.77, 1.19) | 0.91 (0.74, 1.12) | 0.89 |
| **Red Meat**    |     |     |     |     |     |         |
| Median svg/day | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.5 | 0.6 | 1.1 |         |
| HR (95%CI)*     | 1 (ref) | 0.90 (0.74, 1.09) | 0.86 (0.72, 1.03) | 0.84 (0.70, 1.01) | 0.96 (0.77, 1.19) | 0.91 (0.74, 1.12) | 0.89 |
| HR (95%CI)**    | 1 (ref) | 0.92 (0.76, 1.22) | 0.88 (0.73, 1.06) | 0.83 (0.69, 0.99) | 0.96 (0.77, 1.19) | 0.91 (0.74, 1.12) | 0.89 |
| **Red Meat & Processed Meat** |     |     |     |     |     |         |
| Median svg/day | 0.2 | 0.5 | 0.8 | 1.2 | 1.9 |         |
| HR (95%CI)*     | 1 (ref) | 1.15 (0.95, 1.40) | 1.32 (1.09, 1.60) | 1.51 (1.24, 1.84) | 1.53 (1.23, 1.90) | <0.0001 |
| HR (95%CI)**    | 1 (ref) | 0.92 (0.76, 1.22) | 0.88 (0.73, 1.06) | 0.79 (0.64, 0.98) | 0.16 |
| **Poultry**     |     |     |     |     |     |         |
| Median svg/day | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.3 | 0.4 | 0.8 |         |
| HR (95%CI)*     | 1 (ref) | 0.80 (0.67, 0.95) | 0.83 (0.75, 0.95) | 0.88 (0.72, 1.00) | 0.67 (0.55, 0.82) | 0.0007 |
| HR (95%CI)**    | 1 (ref) | 0.83 (0.70, 0.99) | 0.93 (0.75, 1.15) | 0.79 (0.64, 0.98) | 0.16 |
| **Dairy**       |     |     |     |     |     |         |
| Median svg/day | 0.1 | 0.6 | 1.1 | 1.5 | 2.9 |         |
| HR (95%CI)*     | 1 (ref) | 0.88 (0.73, 1.05) | 0.99 (0.83, 1.18) | 0.72 (0.59, 0.87) | 0.88 (0.72, 1.08) | 0.24 |
| HR (95%CI)**    | 1 (ref) | 0.96 (0.80, 1.16) | 1.14 (0.95, 1.37) | 0.85 (0.69, 1.04) | 0.48 (0.34, 0.67) | 0.77 |
| **High-Fat Dairy** |     |     |     |     |     |         |
| Median svg/day | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.4 | 0.8 | 1.2 |         |
| HR (95%CI)*     | 1 (ref) | 1.09 (0.91, 1.31) | 0.96 (0.80, 1.16) | 1.04 (0.86, 1.27) | 1.1 (0.90, 1.34) | 0.56 |
| HR (95%CI)**    | 1 (ref) | 1.16 (0.96, 1.39) | 1.03 (0.86, 1.25) | 1.13 (0.93, 1.38) | 1.14 (0.93, 1.39) | 0.47 |
| **Low-Fat Dairy** |     |     |     |     |     |         |
| Median svg/day | 0   | 0.1 | 0.2 | 0.3 | 0.6 |         |
| HR (95%CI)*     | 1 (ref) | 0.98 (0.81, 1.17) | 1.05 (0.85, 1.29) | 0.95 (0.77, 1.16) | 0.90 (0.74, 1.10) | 0.20 |
| HR (95%CI)**    | 1 (ref) | 1.04 (0.87, 1.25) | 1.17 (0.95, 1.44) | 1.07 (0.87, 1.32) | 1.06 (0.86, 1.31) | 0.58 |
| **Fish & seafood** |     |     |     |     |     |         |
| Median svg/day | 0   | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.4 | 1.0 |         |
| HR (95%CI)*     | 1 (ref) | 0.90 (0.74, 1.09) | 0.86 (0.72, 1.03) | 0.84 (0.70, 1.01) | 1.09 (0.88, 1.34) | 0.20 |
| HR (95%CI)**    | 1 (ref) | 0.92 (0.76, 1.22) | 0.88 (0.73, 1.06) | 0.83 (0.69, 0.99) | 0.96 (0.77, 1.19) | 0.89 |
| **Eggs**        |     |     |     |     |     |         |
| Median svg/day | 0   | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.4 | 1.0 |         |
| HR (95%CI)*     | 1 (ref) | 0.90 (0.74, 1.09) | 0.86 (0.72, 1.03) | 0.84 (0.70, 1.01) | 1.09 (0.88, 1.34) | 0.20 |
| HR (95%CI)**    | 1 (ref) | 0.92 (0.76, 1.22) | 0.88 (0.73, 1.06) | 0.83 (0.69, 0.99) | 0.96 (0.77, 1.19) | 0.89 |
| **Nuts**        |     |     |     |     |     |         |
| Median svg/day | 0   | 0.1 | 0.2 | 0.4 | 1.0 |         |
| HR (95%CI)*     | 1 (ref) | 0.83 (0.70, 0.99) | 0.74 (0.60, 0.90) | 0.71 (0.59, 0.87) | 0.73 (0.60, 0.89) | 0.02 |
| HR (95%CI)**    | 1 (ref) | 0.89 (0.75, 1.06) | 0.86 (0.71, 1.05) | 0.83 (0.68, 1.01) | 0.91 (0.74, 1.12) | 0.07 |
| **Legumes**     |     |     |     |     |     |         |
| Median svg/day | 0   | 0.1 | 0.2 | 0.3 | 0.6 |         |
| HR (95%CI)*     | 1 (ref) | 1.07 (0.89, 1.27) | 1.16 (0.92, 1.46) | 1.05 (0.87, 1.27) | 1.159 (0.93, 1.44) | 0.17 |
| HR (95%CI)**    | 1 (ref) | 1.07 (0.89, 1.27) | 1.16 (0.92, 1.46) | 1.05 (0.87, 1.27) | 1.159 (0.93, 1.44) | 0.17 |

*adjusted for age, sex, race, study, center, and total energy intake.
** adjusted for age, sex, race, study center, total energy intake, smoking, education, systolic blood pressure, use of antihypertensive medication, HDLc, total cholesterol, use of lipid lowering medication, body mass index, waist-to-hip ratio, alcohol intake, sports-related physical activity, leisure-related physical activity, carbohydrate intake, fiber intake, and magnesium intake.
doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0109552.t003

High sodium intake is strongly correlated with the development of hypertension and CHD.
Table 4. Food substitution analysis.

| Source of Dietary Protein | Increase 10% Energy from Carbohydrates | Decrease 10% Energy from Protein | Increase 10% Energy from Fats | Decrease 10% Energy from Protein | Increase 10% Energy from Polyunsaturated Fats | Decrease 10% Energy from Protein | Increase 10% Energy from Saturated Fats | Decrease 10% Energy from Protein | Increase 10% Energy from Protein | Decrease 10% Energy from Protein |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Processed meat           | 0.98 (0.74–1.31)                       | 0.92 (0.74–1.15)                | 0.94 (0.68–1.35)            | 0.95 (0.68–1.35)                | 1.02 (0.80–1.31)                            | 0.95 (0.68–1.35)                | 1.04 (0.80–1.31)                    | 0.95 (0.68–1.35)                | 1.04 (0.80–1.31)                | 0.95 (0.68–1.35)                |
| Red meat                 | 0.91 (0.74–1.17)                       | 1.04 (0.80–1.34)                | 0.94 (0.68–1.35)            | 1.01 (0.80–1.31)                | 1.04 (0.80–1.34)                            | 0.94 (0.68–1.35)                | 1.01 (0.80–1.31)                    | 0.94 (0.68–1.35)                | 1.01 (0.80–1.31)                | 0.94 (0.68–1.35)                |
| Poultry                  | 1.14 (0.90–1.44)                       | 0.93 (0.73–1.18)                | 0.93 (0.73–1.18)            | 0.91 (0.73–1.18)                | 1.02 (0.80–1.31)                            | 0.93 (0.73–1.18)                | 1.02 (0.80–1.31)                    | 0.93 (0.73–1.18)                | 1.02 (0.80–1.31)                | 0.93 (0.73–1.18)                |
| High-fat dairy           | 0.92 (0.74–1.15)                       | 0.98 (0.74–1.11)                | 0.96 (0.84–1.11)            | 0.96 (0.84–1.11)                | 0.96 (0.84–1.11)                            | 0.96 (0.84–1.11)                | 0.96 (0.84–1.11)                    | 0.96 (0.84–1.11)                | 0.96 (0.84–1.11)                | 0.96 (0.84–1.11)                |
| Low-fat dairy            | 0.91 (0.74–1.15)                       | 0.94 (0.74–1.11)                | 0.94 (0.74–1.11)            | 0.94 (0.74–1.11)                | 0.94 (0.74–1.11)                            | 0.94 (0.74–1.11)                | 0.94 (0.74–1.11)                    | 0.94 (0.74–1.11)                | 0.94 (0.74–1.11)                | 0.94 (0.74–1.11)                |
| Fish/seafood             | 0.98 (0.74–1.31)                       | 0.92 (0.74–1.15)                | 0.94 (0.68–1.35)            | 0.95 (0.68–1.35)                | 1.02 (0.80–1.31)                            | 0.95 (0.68–1.35)                | 1.02 (0.80–1.31)                    | 0.95 (0.68–1.35)                | 1.02 (0.80–1.31)                | 0.95 (0.68–1.35)                |
| Eggs                     | 0.96 (0.84–1.11)                       | 0.94 (0.74–1.11)                | 0.94 (0.74–1.11)            | 0.94 (0.74–1.11)                | 0.94 (0.74–1.11)                            | 0.94 (0.74–1.11)                | 0.94 (0.74–1.11)                    | 0.94 (0.74–1.11)                | 0.94 (0.74–1.11)                | 0.94 (0.74–1.11)                |

Nutrient substitution analysis:

- Increasing 10% energy from carbohydrates, decreasing 10% from protein: HR 0.96 (95% CI 0.82–1.14).
- Increasing 10% energy from fats, decreasing 10% from protein: HR 0.99 (95% CI 0.80–1.24).

Accuracy of the data analysis.

In conclusion, using a large community based cohort study we found neither total nor animal or vegetable protein to be associated with CHD. In detailed food group analyses of major protein sources, no statistically significant trends between animal or vegetable-based food groups and risk for CHD were observed. Individuals should continue to make appropriate dietary modifications following current guidelines and recommendations for cardiovascular disease risk reduction [16,36].

Acknowledgments

The authors thank the staff and participants of the ARIC study for their important contributions. AA, BH and NG had full access to all of the data in the study and take responsibility for the integrity of the data and the accuracy of the data analysis.
Author Contributions
Conceived and designed the experiments: BH NG JN MWvB ES AA. Performed the experiments: ES JN BH AA. Analyzed the data: AA NG

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