

# Food Facts Fancies

## Nitrite: Is It Safer Than We Think?

(NAPSA)—For years, processed meat consumers have asked, “What is sodium nitrite and is it necessary?” New research shows that nitrite may be safer than once thought and even offer distinct health benefits.

Nitrite is used in cured meats like ham, hot dogs and bologna to give these products their characteristic taste and color. Nitrite also extends the shelf life of cured products and prevents the growth of harmful bacteria such as *Clostridium botulinum*, which can cause botulism, and *Listeria*.

Scientists worldwide have studied nitrite’s safety and effectiveness, and the body of research has shown that it is both safe and essential. In fact, a landmark, decade long U.S. National Toxicology Program study released in 2000 helped dispel a scientific myth that nitrite caused cancer. NTP’s study even found that nitrite may help prevent some forms of cancer.

But now, the National Institutes of Health has announced that nitrite is showing promise as a treatment for a variety of serious diseases. Researchers are infusing patients with sodium nitrite to assess it as a treatment for sickle cell anemia, heart attacks, brain aneurysms and to ensure the success of organ transplants. This research is yielding very promising results. Plus, researchers say, nitrite could be an inexpensive treatment.

“Just as many people include in their diets vitamins and foods such as blueberries that contain powerful anti-oxidants, few people realize that nitrite itself is an anti-oxidant,” says Dr. Larry Borchert of the University of Wisconsin, an



**Researchers say nitrite, the preservative in many foods, may show promise in the treatment of heart attacks.**

expert on nitrite and cured meats. Borchert contends that many people worry about nitrite needlessly when the evidence is mounting that nitrite may have public health and medical benefits.

According to Borchert, 93 percent of human nitrite intake actually comes from vegetables and our own saliva. Vegetables contain nitrate, which is converted to nitrite in the mouth. And “eat your vegetables” has long been advice known to ensure health and prevent disease.

“The nitrite scientific puzzle is now coming together and the picture is becoming clear: Nitrite is a safe and essential ingredient in cured meats—and a potential medical treatment,” Borchert says. “As your mother always said, eat your vegetables. And enjoy your hot dogs along with them.”

For more information about nitrite safety, visit the Web site at [www.meatsafety.org](http://www.meatsafety.org).