# **Why eating ham or sausages four times a week could worsen asthma**

* **New study in a Paris hospital tracked 971 people with asthma over four years**
* **14% of people who ate processed meats once a week saw symptoms worsen**
* **But in those who ate it four times a week, 20% saw their conditions deteriorate**
* **In those who ate it more than four times, the percentage was 22, study found**

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Eating ham or sausages four times a week could worsen asthma symptoms, experts have warned.

The research suggests the 5.4million people in the UK who suffer with asthma could be at greater risk of problems if they eat too much cured or processed meat.

Scientists believe the nitrites used to process cured meat such as salami may trigger inflammation in the airways - a typical feature of asthma.

The experts, from Paul Brousse Hospital in Paris, tracked 971 people and monitored diet and asthma symptoms such as ease of breathing, chest tightness and shortness of breath.

Among those who ate ham, sausage or dried sausage no more than once a week, 14 per cent saw their asthma symptoms worsen over four years.

Among those eating cured meat one to four times a week, 20 per cent saw their symptoms get worse.

And those who ate cured meat four or more times a week, 22 per cent had worsening asthma.

After taking account influential factors such as smoking, physical activity and age, the researchers calculated that those who ate the most cured meats were 76 per cent more likely to experience worsening asthma symptoms than those who ate the least.

Being overweight or obese, which has previously been linked to worsening asthma, accounted for just 14 per cent of this association, the calculations showed, suggesting meat intake was independently linked to symptoms.

The scientists, whose work is published in the BMJ journal Thorax, said they could not be sure of the reasons for the link, given their study was merely statistical.

But they said the nitrites, salt and fat in cured meat may play a role.

‘Cured meats are rich in nitrite, which may lead to nitrosative stress and oxidative stress related lung damage and asthma,’ the authors wrote.

‘Cured meat might increase the systemic inflammation, which may have an influence on asthma.

‘In addition, the high content of salt and saturated fat in cured meat might also contribute in part to the association with asthma.

‘Further studies need to be carried out to improve our understanding regarding potential mechanistic processes.’

Dr Erika Kennington, head of Research at Asthma UK, said: ‘This is an interesting study suggesting a potential link between the consumption of cured meats and the aggravation of asthma symptoms in some people - however, it does not show a definite cause-and-effect from eating processed meats.

‘Although certain foods can be triggers for allergies in some people, there is no specific dietary advice to manage asthma symptoms generally.

‘For most people with asthma, healthy eating advice is exactly the same as it is for everyone else: follow a balanced diet that includes plenty of fresh and unprocessed food and is low in sugar, salt and saturated fat.’

Catherine Collins, spokesman for the British Dietetic Association, added: ‘Diet does have a role to play in prevention and management of asthma, but an association with one aspect of diet - in this case processed meats - doesn’t, and can’t, imply causation.

‘A varied and Mediterranean-style diet remains the optimal anti-inflammatory style diet, whether you have asthma or not.’