# ASTHMA WARNING: Eating processed meat FOUR times a week 'can trigger symptoms'

### EATING ham or other processed meat four times a week can trigger asthma symptoms, according to new research.

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The study suggests a high dietary intake of cured and processed meats - such as ham, sausages or salami - is linked to worsening asthma symptoms.

And four or more weekly servings seem to have the greatest impact on symptoms, according to the findings published online by the journal Thorax.

Researchers say cured and processed meat is rich in nitrites, which may have a role in airway inflammation-a typical feature of asthma.

Researchers looked at the rench Epidemiological study on the Genetics and Environment of Asthma (EGEA) to examine the link between processed meat, worsening of asthma symptoms and the role of obesity.

The study looked at more than 2,000 asthma patients, their close relatives, and a comparison group from five cities in France for more than 20 years.

The current study is based on 971 adults for whom complete dietary, weight (BMI), asthma symptom score and demographic data were obtained.

Dietary intake was measured using food frequency questionnaires encompassing 118 items in 46 food groups.

Intake of cured meat - including ham, sausage and salami - was classified as low for one or fewer weekly servings; medium for one to four weekly servings; and high for four or more.

Asthma symptoms, such as difficulty breathing, chest tightness, and shortness of breath in the preceding 12 months, were scored from zero to five (asthma symptom score).

Information was also gathered on other potentially influential factors, such as smoking, regular physical activity, age, sex, and educational attainment.

Between 2003 and 2007, 42 per cent of the participants said they had had asthma at some point, and around half (51 per cent) had never smoked.

Just over a third (35 per cent) were overweight, while one in 11 (nine per cent) were obese.

Participants said they ate an average of 2.5 servings of cured or processed meat a week.

By 2011-13, when the next checks were made, there had been no change in asthma symptom score for just over half the participants (53 per cent).

But in one in five (20 per cent) symptoms had worsened and in around one in four (27 per cent) symptoms had improved.

Among those who ate one or fewer weekly servings, the proportion of those with worsening asthma symptoms was 14 per cent; among those eating one to four, the proportion was 20 per cent; and among those eating four or more, the proportion was 22 per cent.

After taking account of potentially influential factors, such as smoking, regular physical activity, age, sex, and educational attainment, those who ate the most cured meats were 76 per cent more likely to experience worsening asthma symptoms than those who ate the least.

Obesity, which has previously been linked to worsening asthma, accounted for just 14 per cent of the association.

The researchers said the findings suggest that processed meat intake may have an independent role in asthma symptoms.

They said no firm conclusions can be drawn about cause and effect as it was only an observational study.

But they added that research from other countries points to a potential role for cured and processed meats in lung function and health.

Study author Dr Zhen Li, of Paul Brousse Hospital in France, said: “This research extends the deleterious effect of cured meat on health, and the effect of diet on asthma in adults, and provides a novel analytic approach regarding the role of BMI in the diet-asthma association.”