# Four ham sandwiches a week could almost double risk of asthma attack

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Eating processed meat could almost double the risk of asthma attacks, a major study suggests.

The study of almost 1,000 adults found that regularly eating processed meats – such as bacon, salami, sausages and ham – was linked to a worsening in the condition.

Cured and processed meat is rich in nitrates, which may inflame the airways, [increasing the severity of asthma,](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/food-and-drink/features/suffer-from-asthma-eating-these-foods-could-help/) experts said.

The French study tracked 971 adults for at least six years, with four in 10 reporting that they had suffered from asthma at the start of the study.

Those eating at least four portions of processed meats a week were 76 per cent more likely to experience worsening asthma symptoms, compared with those who ate the least.

A portion was counted as one sausage, or the typical two slices of ham that might be used in a sandwich.

Participants said they ate an average of two and a half servings of cured/processed meat a week.

When checks were made, at least six years later, half of those with asthma had seen no change in symptoms.

In one in five cases, symptoms had worsened and in around one in four had improved.

The proportion of those with worsening symptoms was least in those eating one or less portion of meat each week.

Just 14 per cent saw a deterioriation, compared with 22 per cent of those eating at least 4 portions a week.

Experts said that when other factors – such as smoking, exercise levels, and age were taken into account, those eating the most cured meats were 76 per cent more likely to experience worsening asthma symptoms than those who ate the least.

Being overweight has also been linked to worsening asthma.

But the new study led by Paul Brousse Hospital, published in the journal *Thorax*, suggested this accounted for just 14 per cent of the association.

Experts said the study was observational and could not prove cause and effect, while relying on respondents to have a good recall of their daily habits.

But they said the findings, combined with other studies suggesting cured meats could affect lung function, suggests processed meat could damage the health

“This research extends the deleterious effect of cured meat on health, and the effect of diet on asthma in adults,” they conclude.

Last year the World Health Organisation [caused controversy when it ranked processed meat](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/health/news/11950018/Bacon-ham-and-sausages-as-big-a-cancer-threat-as-smoking-WHO-to-warn.html) as a cancer threat, giving it the same risk status as cigarettes, arsenic and alcohol.

The World Cancer Research Fund has said there is "strong evidence" that [processed meats increase cancer risk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/health/news/11954640/World-Health-Organisation-report-processed-meats.html).