

Processed meat 'is to blame for one in 30 deaths': Scientists say a rasher of cheap bacon a day is harmful

- **Analysis of diets of 500,000 linked meat to cancer and heart disease deaths**
- **Should be 'limit of no more than 20g a day of processed meat', equal to one rasher of cheap bacon or one full English breakfast a week**

By Fiona Macrae

Meals containing too much processed meat such as cheap ham, bacon and sausages could send you to an early grave, a large-scale study has found.

Analysis of the diets and medical history of almost half a million men and women linked processed meat to deaths from cancer and heart disease.

The Europe-wide research, including work by Oxbridge scientists, found that processed meat is to blame for about one in 30 deaths.

The researchers suggested a limit of no more than 20g a day of processed meat – equal to one rasher of cheap bacon.



It may look good, but a major Europe-wide research, including work by Oxbridge scientists, found that processed meat such as cheap bacon or ham is to blame for about one in 30 deaths

The warning comes in the wake of the horsemeat scandal which has caused many consumers to question the origins of their food.

Processed meat, made by combining the leftover parts of animals which cannot be sold as good cuts such as steaks and joints, contains high concentrations of fat, including artery-clogging cholesterol. The researchers from ten European countries quizzed almost 450,000 people, many of them Britons, and tracked their health for an average of 13 years.

They said: 'Men and women with a high consumption of processed meat are at increased risk of early death, particularly due to cardiovascular diseases but also cancer.'

Some 26,344 of the participants died over the course of the study, with those who ate the biggest amounts of processed meat being 44 per cent more likely to have died than those who ate the lowest amounts. The figures for heart disease were striking – those who ate the most processed meat, more than 160g or three sausages a day, were 72 per cent more likely to die of heart disease.



Processed meat such as bacon and sausages could send you to an early grave, a large-scale study has found

A study last year found that eating 50g of processed meat a day – the equivalent of one sausage or three rashers of bacon – raises the likelihood of cancer by a fifth. But in the latest, much bigger study, those who ate the most processed meat were almost 50 per cent more likely to suffer an early death, with heart disease the overwhelming cause. The study, published in the journal BMC Medicine, concluded that a limit of 20g a day of processed meat – equal to a rasher of bacon or one full English breakfast a week – would prevent about 20,000 early deaths in the UK each year. Tracy Parker, a dietician at the British Heart Foundation, said: 'With spring in the air, many of us may be looking forward to sunny barbecues. But this research suggests processed meat, such as sausages and burgers, may be linked to an increased risk of early death.'



Diets laden with pies, sausages, and ready meals can lead to an early death, a major study has shown

'However, the people who ate the most processed meat in this study also made other unhealthy lifestyle choices.'

'They were found to eat less fruit and vegetables and were more likely to smoke, which may have had an impact on results.'

Professor Karol Sikora, one of Britain's leading cancer specialists and an unpaid member of the industry-backed Meat Advisory Panel, said the key to good health is a balanced diet.

He said: 'Don't worry about having a bacon sandwich. It is not going to kill you. But don't have four bacon sandwiches every day for your whole life.'

The amount of white meat eaten, such as chicken, was not linked to death rates by the researchers, while small amounts of red meat appeared beneficial.

A Department of Health spokesman said: 'It's important that everyone eats a balanced diet. Eating well and being active can help prevent serious illnesses such as cancer and heart disease later in life.'

'Red meat can be part of a balanced diet. But people who eat a lot of red and processed meat should consider cutting down as regularly eating a lot could increase your risk of bowel cancer.'

'For tips on how to eat well and be more active, visit the [Change4Life website](#).'



Burgers, sausages and pies were particularly singled out as being harmful