

The cold truth about cold cuts

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(HealthDay)—They may seem like an easy solution for lunch, but pre-packaged sliced meat and processed deli counter options aren't just short on nutrition, they also pose health risks, health experts say.

If you often rely on them, it's time to reconsider what you put between your sandwich bread or toss into a salad.

Processed meats have been preserved by smoking, curing and/or salting. Many have added chemical preservatives—like sodium nitrate—that have potential [health risks](#).

As with bacon and hot dogs, cold cuts like pastrami, salami, ham and corned beef are also high in high-calorie saturated fat—bad for your heart, bad for your waistline and, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), a colorectal cancer risk. Eating just two slices of ham a day can raise that risk by 18 percent, the WHO says.

While some packaged lunch meat brands state that they're lower in calories than others, if they're still processed, they'll likely also still have unwanted ingredients.

Healthier alternatives are roast chicken and turkey. Make your own bird and you'll have enough for a few meals (but skip eating the skin to save on fat and calories). If you're short on time, buy fresh store-roasted poultry rather than packaged chicken or turkey slices. Freshly made lean roast beef is another option.

So, when you're choosing lunch options, always remember that there's more than the calorie content to consider. The way meat is prepared is as important as its fat content. If processed, even lower-fat deli meat isn't a healthy option, [health experts](#) say.

Don't let cold cuts cut into your diet success.

More information: The MD Anderson Cancer Center has more on the connection between [processed meat and colorectal cancer](#) as well as healthier food options.

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