

SALT

Do we need salt?

It is the sodium in salt that is used by our bodies. Sodium is needed to ensure that our muscles and nerves work properly and it helps us maintain normal blood pressure. However, too much sodium in the diet can increase the risk of high blood pressure which increases the risk of heart disease and stroke.

How much salt is safe?

The salt we need is found naturally in many foods, so we easily get this amount without adding it to our food.

The Department of Health now recommends that everyone should half their salt intake to no more than 6g of salt a day, the average salt intake in the UK is currently between 9g and 12g per person per day.

Ideally in time experts would like to reduce our intake to 4g per day.

Shake the salt habit

Some people put salt on everything before even tasting it! This is a habit that your taste buds have got used to, but if you gradually reduce the amount of salt you eat they will soon adapt and eventually you will prefer less salty food.

Understanding salt labelling

Many people find labels confusing. Salt content can be listed as salt or as sodium. However the amounts are not the same. So to be able to compare like for like you may have to convert sodium into salt.

How to convert sodium into salt:

1. Work out the amount of sodium per 100g
2. Multiply by 2.5
3. $1\text{g sodium} / 100\text{g} \times 2.5 = 2.5\text{g salt} / 100\text{g}$



Per 100g and per serving

However you have to also remember that the content has to be worked out for the total amount of food you eat in one serving and not just in 100g.

The label may say 1.3 grams of salt per 100g but if one serving is 300g for example then your intake will contain $1.3 \times 3 = 4$ grams of salt.

What is high or low?

Equal or less than 0.005g sodium per 100g is salt free.

< 0.1g sodium is low salt content.

0.2 - 0.4g sodium is medium salt content.

Above 0.5g sodium is high salt content.

If no value is given, then the food has a higher salt content than the above criteria.

Read the label!

It is quite surprising to see the difference between breakfast cereals or makes of bread, for example. Not all 'healthy options' are healthy in salt content.

How to reduce salt in your diet

- Don't add salt at the table or in cooking. Check with your doctor before you use low salt alternatives, as they usually contain potassium, which can also be harmful.
- Avoid processed foods, which contain more than three quarters of the salt hidden in our diet. This includes ready meals, fast foods or convenience foods and many canned foods.
- Avoid bacon, sausages, ham, cheese, pizzas, sachet soups and stock cubes.
- Avoid salted crisps, nuts, crackers or other salty snacks especially when socialising as they will also make you thirsty and encourage you to drink more alcohol.
- Use other flavourings such as herbs and spices, lemon and garlic to add interest to your food.

- Eat fresh foods, they have no added salt in them.
- Look for products that declare themselves low salt or reduced salt.
- Be aware that some foods can have an unexpectedly high salt content such as cereals, mineral water and bread. Even some low fat yoghurts and ice-cream can contain hidden salt. Check the labels!

REMEMBER A BALANCED LOW FAT DIET IS ALSO VERY IMPORTANT.

High sodium foods	Low sodium alternatives
Processed foods such as ham, bacon, sausages, hamburgers and most 'convenience' meals	Fresh meat, especially chicken
Smoked or tinned fish	Fresh fish
Tinned foods e.g. soup, baked beans, vegetables	Fresh vegetables, home made soup, low or no added salt versions
Meat and yeast extracts, stock cubes	Herbs, spices, chilli, garlic, ginger, lemon juice
All bottled sauces, ketchup, chutney, salad cream	Home made sauces, fromage frais or yoghurt
Crisps, salted or roasted peanuts, other savoury snacks	Unsalted nuts, fresh or dried fruit, sliced vegetables
Salted, savoury or cheesy biscuits	Home made or low salt versions
Cheese, particularly hard and blue cheeses	Cream cheese
Bought bread or pizza (even wholemeal), can have a high salt content	Home made bread made without salt e.g. using a bread maker

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Information and news on all aspects of salt and health.

The Blood Pressure Association

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Website: www.bpassoc.org.uk

Only UK wide charity dealing solely with high blood pressure. Provides a wide range of information to people offering advice on medication, home monitoring and lifestyle changes.

Free membership, newsletter.

If you would like to speak to one of our nurses in confidence,
please call the Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland Advice Line

Monday - Friday 9.30am - 4.00pm

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