This factsheet looks at the risks of too much salt in your diet and provides tips and advice on ways to reduce your salt intake.

Too much salt (also known as sodium chloride) can raise your blood pressure. This can increase your risk of heart disease and stroke. Reducing your salt intake can help to reduce your blood pressure. If you have heart failure, too much salt can make your symptoms worse and it is recommended that you restrict the amount of salt in your diet.

About 75% (three-quarters) of the salt we eat is ‘hidden’ in everyday foods. These include bread, ready meals, processed meats, soup, sauces, and some breakfast cereals. 15% of salt occurs naturally in the food we eat. 10% of salt we add ourselves when cooking or eating. Food can often contain a lot of salt but not taste salty.

How much salt do I need?

It is true that a very small amount of salt is essential for your health. A little salt is needed to help regulate the fluid in your body. It also helps to ensure muscles and nerves remain healthy. However, too much salt in your diet can be harmful. It is recommended that adults eat no more than 6g of salt a day. In Scotland, however, we eat on average 7.8g of salt a day. This is almost a third higher than the recommended limit. So, what does 6g of salt look like...? It’s about 1 level teaspoon’s worth.

Each of these contain ¼ teaspoon salt* =
- 1 individual pork pie
- 1 sausage roll
- 60g cornflakes with milk

Each of these contain ½ teaspoon salt* =
- 2 noodle sachets
- 1 tin cream of tomato soup
- 3 rashers bacon

Each of these contain 1 teaspoon salt* =
- 3-4 slices meat pizza
- 12 slices bread
- 3 tablespoons soy sauce

*All figures are approximations
How do I know how much salt is in my food?
Most pre-packaged food includes a nutrition label. The nutrition label includes information on how much salt is in the food per 100g or per portion. You can use the nutrition label to help you choose foods low in salt.

A lot of foods also include colour-coded information on its packaging. This indicates whether the food contains high (red), medium (amber) or low (green) amounts of fat, saturates, sugars and salt. The values refer to per 100g or per portion of the food. Remember to check the label as your idea of a portion size may be different to the one on the package. The percentages on the food label tell you what percentage of the recommended daily intake of each nutrient is in each portion. The percentages are based on a healthy adult diet.

Aim to eat more foods that are colour-coded green or amber. Foods that are colour-coded red should be eaten only occasionally and in small amounts.

What can I use instead of salt?
Flavour can come from many things other than salt. Fresh and dried herbs, spices, black pepper, chilli and lemon are all great ways to add flavour to your food. Over time we acquire a taste for salt and get used to it in our diets. By replacing salt with other flavours, however, you will get used to less salt. It can take 6-8 weeks for your taste buds to adjust to a lower salt diet. Don’t give up and you will soon find you start to appreciate other flavours more.

Here are some suggestions of herbs and spices to use instead of salt and ideas for what foods go with what flavouring.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Herb</th>
<th>Food Pairs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chilli</td>
<td>coriander, broccoli, garlic, lime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutmeg</td>
<td>butternut squash, avocado, spinach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosemary</td>
<td>goat’s cheese, potatoes, apricots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basil</td>
<td>tomatoes, garlic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paprika</td>
<td>tomatoes, potatoes, chicken, eggs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thyme</td>
<td>mushrooms, chicken, garlic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turmeric</td>
<td>mushrooms, potatoes, lentils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curry Powder</td>
<td>chickpeas, lentils, eggs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coriander</td>
<td>chilli, chickpeas, lentils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sage</td>
<td>turkey, apples, pork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parsley</td>
<td>potatoes, fish</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How can I reduce my salt intake?

When choosing your food:

- **Fresh is best.** Choose fresh foods over processed foods, packaged foods or takeaways.

- **Look at the nutrition labels on food packaging.** You can really cut down on your salt intake by comparing brands and choosing the one that is lowest in salt.

- **Pick reduced-salt and unsmoked products where possible.** Foods such as cured meats and fish and smoked bacon can be high in salt. Try to eat these less often. Lean red meat or chicken are better options.

- If you are buying tinned vegetables and pulses, **choose ones without added salt**, such as reduced-salt baked beans.

- **Limit the use** of soy sauce, mustard, pickles and table sauces as these can all be high in salt.

When cooking your food:

- **Instead of using salt,** try flavouring your foods with fresh or dried herbs, black pepper, chilli, spices, balsamic vinegar, onion, fresh garlic or ginger.

- **Lemon or lime juice and zest** can be used in both sweet and savoury dishes.

- **Make your own stock and gravy** instead of using cubes or granules which can be high in salt.

- **Try baking or roasting vegetables.** These include red peppers, tomatoes, courgettes, fennel, parsnips and squash.

- **Drain and rinse** canned vegetables and beans before using.

When eating your food:

- **Shake the salt habit!** Taste your food first and don’t automatically add extra salt in your cooking or at the table.

- **Use pepper as seasoning instead of salt.** Try it on pasta, scrambled egg, pizzas, fish and soups.

- **Try not to use low sodium/salt alternatives.** They don’t help your taste buds to adapt to less salt. They can also be high in other minerals such as potassium (which may be harmful for some people).

- **When eating out,** ask for ‘no added salt’ and for sauces and gravies ‘on the side’.
**High-salt foods and low-salt alternatives**
The tables below provide examples of high-salt foods and low-salt alternatives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HIGH-SALT FOODS</th>
<th>LOW-SALT ALTERNATIVES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Processed meats (bacon, ham, salami, sausages)</td>
<td>Fresh meat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheese, particularly hard and blue cheeses</td>
<td>Cottage cheese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoked or tinned fish</td>
<td>Fresh fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tinned foods (soup, baked beans, vegetables)</td>
<td>Fresh vegetables, home-made soup, dried beans, reduced-salt vegetables or baked beans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meat and yeast extracts, stock cubes, Marmite</td>
<td>Herbs, spices, chilli, garlic, ginger, lemon juice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottled sauces such as soy sauce, ketchup, chutney, pickles, salad cream</td>
<td>Home-made sauces, fromage frais, natural yoghurt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisps, salted or dry roasted peanuts</td>
<td>Unsalted popcorn, unsalted nuts and seeds, dried fruit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For further information:
NHS Livewell
www.nhs.uk/LiveWell

Food Standards Scotland (FSS)
Tel: 01224 285100
www.foodstandards.gov.scot

Blood Pressure UK
www.bloodpressureuk.org

Food scanner app
The Change4Life Food Scanner is a free app you can download to your smartphone. You can use it to scan barcodes on food packets to help you check how much salt, sugar and saturated fat is in the food. The app also gives simple hints and tips to help you make healthy food choices.
www.nhs.uk/Tools/Pages/food-scanner-app.aspx/

If you would like to speak to one of our nurses in confidence, please call the Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland Advice Line:
0808 801 0899
free to call from landlines and mobiles.