

GET SMART WITH SALT



Get Smart with Salt

Most experts agree that too much salt is bad for us – but why? How much is too much? And how can you cut down and still enjoy great tasting food?

How does salt affect the heart?

Salt is made up of sodium and chloride; it's the sodium part which is associated with health problems. Eating too much sodium raises your blood pressure, which in turn increases the risk of heart disease and stroke.

Because we have a temperate climate our bodies only need a very small amount of salt, around 1g per day. However many of us are eating around 9g per day and some people eat as much as 12g per day.

Some individuals are more sensitive and show evidence of increased blood pressure at lower intakes of salt. However for most of us the guidelines suggest no more than 6g of salt a day; that's about a teaspoon. The recommendations for children are even lower.

So where does all our salt come from? Two thirds of it comes from the salt present in manufactured foods. The rest is what we add ourselves, in cooking or at the table and some is naturally present in food.

How to eat less salt

- Use less in cooking
- Try to get out of the habit of routinely adding salt to your food. Taste food before you add salt to it
- Cut down on salty snacks such as crisps, Bombay mix, salted nuts and other salty snacks
- When buying canned vegetables opt for those without added salt
- Buy canned fish in spring water, tomato sauce or heart healthy oils
- When buying soups, sauces and ready meals look for ones that are lower in salt
- Avoid stock cubes and gravy mix, try making your own stock or buy low salt stock cubes

Understanding Labels

Any food that comes out of a packet, can, jar or box has the potential to have added salt. Reading the label will help you to decide. To check out the amount of salt in food products, look at the figure for salt per 100g under the nutritional information panel and compare to the amounts in the table. Use the information under Traffic Lights and Guideline Daily Amounts to check against new front of pack labeling.

	Nutritional Information	Traffic Light Labelling	Guideline Daily Amount (GDA)
High salt	More than 1.5g salt per 100g (or 0.6g sodium)	Red	More than 25% of GDA
Medum salt	Between 0.3g and 1.5g salt per 100g (0.1g to 0.6g sodium)	Amber	Between 5 and 25% of your GDA
Low salt	Low is 0.3g salt or less per 100g (or 0.1g sodium)	Green	5% GDA or less

How to spice up your food

- Use spices and herbs to add flavour to your food instead of salt
- Toast seeds, nuts and spices to bring out their whole flavour
- Use mustard to spice up recipes and salad dressings or use as a condiment
- Add fresh chilli, ginger and garlic to provide a bite to your dishes
- Use canned tomatoes and tomato puree as a basis for casseroles, sauces and soups
- Marinate fish or meat in advance to give them more flavour
- Use the juice from lemons or limes to squeeze on fish and shellfish

How much salt should children have?

Because children are smaller than adults they should have even less salt. The daily recommended maximums for children are set out below and depend on their age:

- 1 to 3 years – no more than 2g salt a day (0.8g sodium)
- 4 to 6 years – no more than 3g salt a day (1.2g sodium)
- 7 to 10 years – no more than 5g salt a day (2g sodium)
- 11 and over and adults – no more than 6g salt a day (2.4g sodium)

If children have too much salt, this could affect their health now and in the future. And it could also give them a taste for salty food, which means they're more likely to continue eating too much salt when they grow up.

For more information on salt and health, log on to www.salt.gov.uk