

## Salt

We are all told that eating too much salt is bad for you, but why it is bad for you and how you can eat less is not always clear. This Food Fact Sheet will look at the risks of eating too much salt and ways to reduce your salt intake.

### Salt and health

Eating too much salt increases your risk of developing high blood pressure (hypertension), which is a major risk factor for heart disease, kidney disease and stroke. By reducing your salt intake it is possible to reduce your blood pressure and the health problems it causes, so it's well worth doing.

Many everyday foods are not obviously salty, but do contain high amounts of 'hidden salt'. It's easier to make healthier food choices if you are able to quickly check the salt content on food labels.

### How much?

The average daily salt intake in the UK is about 8.1g (one and a half teaspoons!), but we should be having much less than this – no more than 6g (one teaspoon) a day for adults and less for children. Some of the salt we eat comes from the salt we use in cooking salt, and some from the salt we add at the table.

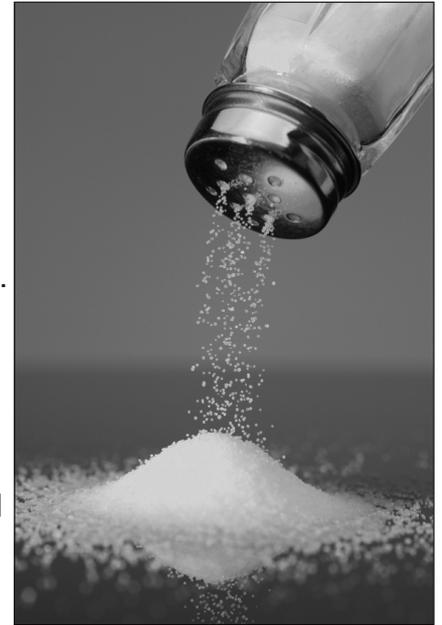
About 75% of the salt we eat is already added to the ready-made food we buy. Most of this comes from the salt added to everyday foods like processed meat products, snacks such as crisps and biscuits, ready meals, soup, pasta sauces, bread and some breakfast cereals.

Making the decision to cut down on processed foods especially if you eat them often or in large portions, can make a big difference to your intake. Reducing your intake of salty foods is an important part of a healthy diet.

### Salt sums

Salt is also called 'sodium chloride', as it is made up from two naturally occurring parts – sodium and chlorine. Salt is found naturally in many foods like meat and vegetables but is also added to foods to improve taste and shelf life. In fact we can get all the salt our bodies need

from natural sources and we don't need to add it to our food. It is the sodium part of salt that is a concern to health, and current food labels list the sodium content of food.



### Newsflash - no more sodium on labels

Food labelling is changing – by December 2014 all food labels will only list salt; sodium will not be listed. This will make it much easier for you to see how much salt each product contains.

A food manufacturer may also list this as salt to help you to understand what you are eating.

To convert sodium to salt - multiply by 2.5. For example:

To find out how much salt is in a food containing 0.8g sodium multiply 0.8 by 2.5 ( $0.8 \times 2.5 = 2\text{g}$  salt).

### Let's be practical

Choose lower salt options using the following guidelines on food labels:

- A food high in salt has more than 1.5g salt per 100g (or 0.6g sodium).

- A food with medium salt content is between 0.3g (or 0.1g sodium) and 1.5g salt (0.6g sodium).
- A low salt food is 0.3g salt or less per 100g (or 0.1g sodium).

For ready meals and sandwiches - try to choose meals with under 0.5g sodium per meal, that's 1.25g salt.

For individual foods - such as soups and sauces - try to choose foods with under 0.3g sodium per serving, that's 0.75g salt.

## Be salt aware

- Use little or no salt in cooking; try using extra herbs and spices instead such as black pepper.
- Leave the salt shaker off the table.
- Cut down on salty processed foods and ready meals and try and make your own if you can
- Check out food labels for salt and go for lower salt choices. There can be a really big difference between different types and brands.
- Foods high in salt may display a red traffic light label, medium amber and low green on the front of the packet.
- Compare the salt levels on a few similar products and always try to choose those lower in salt.
- Ask in restaurants and take-aways for no salt.
- Sea salt is no better for your health than table salt, it still adds unnecessary sodium chloride to your diet.

The main foods containing salt are:

- salty meats and processed meat products such as ham, bacon, sausages, pate, salami
- canned, packet and instant soups
- ketchup, soy sauce, mayonnaise, pickles
- stock cubes, gravy powder and salted flavourings

- any canned food containing salt
- smoked meat and fish, prawns and anchovies
- meat and yeast extracts
- salted snacks like crisps, salted nuts, salted biscuits, popcorn
- high salt ready meals, sauces and takeaway meals
- pasta sauce
- sandwiches
- cheese
- bread and breakfast cereals are an important part of a healthy diet but some contain salt - compare labels when you are shopping and choose the ones lower in salt.

## Summary

Most of us are eating too much salt (sodium chloride). It is added to processed foods; we may also add it during cooking or at the table. We should all be aiming for less than 6g (one teaspoon) of salt each day. High salt intakes lead to high blood pressure (hypertension) that increases our risk of heart disease, stroke and kidney disease.

There are many simple steps that can be taken to reduce our salt intake including eating less processed foods, being aware of food labels and choosing lower salt options. We should also try to add less salt during cooking and at the table. If you have high blood pressure, being active, keeping a healthy weight, not drinking too much alcohol and regular check-ups are also important.

### Further information:

Food Fact Sheets on other topics including Hypertension and Healthy Eating are available at [www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts](http://www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts)

This Food Factsheet is a public service of The British Dietetic Association (BDA) intended for information only. It is not a substitute for proper medical diagnosis or dietary advice given by a dietitian. If you need to see a dietitian, visit your GP for a referral or: [www.freelancedietitians.org](http://www.freelancedietitians.org) for a private dietitian. To check your dietitian is registered check [www.hpc-uk.org](http://www.hpc-uk.org)

This Food Fact Sheet and others are available to download free of charge at [www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts](http://www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts)

Written by Luci Daniels, Dietitian. Updated by Sylvia Turner and Alison Nelson, Dietitians

The information sources used to develop this fact sheet are available at [www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts](http://www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts)

© BDA March 2013. Review date March 2016. Version 3.

