

# Salt

A guide on lowering  
your salt intake

Information for  
patients





## What is salt?

Salt is made up of two chemicals, sodium and chloride and can be found in most of the foods that we eat, so it is difficult to avoid.

Salt may also be added to food to preserve it or give extra flavour.

## How much salt do I need?

Our bodies only need a small amount of salt which can be found naturally in food. Most of us are eating too much; therefore we do not need to add any extra salt to our meals.

The average salt intake is 8.1 g per day.

It is recommended that we **all** reduce our intake to 6 g or less, per day, which is about 1 teaspoon.

## Why do we need to cut down?

Eating too much salt has been linked to many health problems which can affect everyone. These include high blood pressure, stroke and heart conditions. It is the sodium in salt that causes these problems:

- A high salt intake can work against some medications or treatments that you may be receiving
- Eating too many salty foods can also make you thirsty, which may cause you to drink too much fluid. This may be a problem, if your fluid intake has been restricted
- Too much salt may cause you to retain water. This can result in swollen ankles, raised blood pressure and in serious cases fluid can collect around the heart and lungs

## Where does my salt intake come from?

Most salt is **'hidden'** in food.

- 75 % is present in processed and convenience foods
- 15 % is added to food in cooking or at the table
- 10 % is naturally present in food

Most of the salt we eat is already added to the food we buy. It is found in canned food, jars, ready-made meals and take-away foods. It is important to be able to understand the labels on foods, so that you can make healthier choices.

## What do the labels mean?

The information on food labels is very useful, although it can vary. Products may list the salt or the sodium content of the food.

To convert sodium to salt: multiply by 2.5

To convert salt to sodium: divide by 2.5

### For example:

0.8 g sodium = 2 g salt

1 g salt = 0.4 g sodium

When looking at the labels you need to consider the portion of the food you will be eating. The salt or sodium content of the food will be listed per 100 g of product but may also be listed per serving.

**For example:**

	Salt per 100 g	Salt per serving Foods
Cornflakes	2.5 g	0.8 g
Soup: tinned tomato	1.0 g	2.2 g

**‘At a glance’ label guide**

We all eat some processed or convenience foods sometimes. If you need to use these foods, these guidelines will help you choose a lower salt option.

For ready meals and sandwiches, aim for a product containing less than 1.25 g salt or 0.5 g sodium per serving.

For individual foods e.g. sauces, snacks and cereals aim for a product containing less than 0.75 g salt or 0.3 g sodium per serving.

## Front of pack labelling

### Traffic Light System

This shows at a glance if the food has a high (red), medium (amber / yellow) or low (green) amount of nutrients including salt. Choose foods which are labelled green as much as possible, and keep those labelled red to a minimum.

	<b>Sugars</b>	<b>Fat</b>	<b>Saturates</b>	<b>SALT</b>
What is <b>high</b> per 100 g	over	over	over	over
	15 g	20 g	5 g	1.5 g
What is <b>medium</b> per 100 g	between	between	between	<b>between</b>
	5 g	3 g	1.5 g	<b>0.3 g</b>
	and	and	and	<b>and</b>
	15 g	20 g	5.0 g	<b>1.5 g</b>
What is <b>low</b> per 100g	5 g	3 g	1.5 g	<b>0.3 g</b>
	and below	and below	and below	<b>and below</b>

Based on information supplied by the Food Standards Agency (FSA)

### Guideline Daily Amounts (GDA)

The label also shows, as a percentage, how much of recommended daily salt intake will be found in a portion of the food. You can use this to compare different foods such as pizza and ready-made meals.

## Top tips on lowering the salt

1. Avoid adding salt to your food during cooking and at the table, instead try using black pepper, garlic, herbs, spices, vinegar or lemon juice to add flavour
2. Cut down on the amount of salty ingredients used in cooking e.g. stock cubes, soy sauce, pre-mixed or all purpose seasonings, instead use low-salt stock cubes or try making your own stock
3. Avoid salty foods such as crisps, nuts and salted biscuits; try to choose plain and unsalted varieties instead
4. Cook with fresh foods as regularly as possible rather than relying on ready-made or processed foods
5. Try to limit your intake of salty meats and fish e.g. bacon, gammon, corned beef and smoked fish to occasional use
6. Choose fresh and frozen vegetables, where possible. If you use tinned vegetables, choose those in water rather than brine
7. Try choosing breakfast cereals which are low in salt or have no added salt such as porridge, Shredded Wheat and Weetabix
8. Avoid tinned and packet soups. Try homemade soups instead using onion, garlic, celery and homemade stocks for flavouring
9. Use lower salt cheese such as cream cheese or cottage cheese and limit your hard cheese intake to 4 oz (120 g) per week
10. Remember to avoid salt substitutes e.g. Lo-Salt and supermarket own brands.

**Some products may be labelled as “reduced salt”. Check the food label before you buy as they may contain salt substitutes.**

## Will my food taste different if I use less salt?

It may take about 6 weeks for your taste buds to adjust to eating less salt. At first you may miss the salty taste so it may be easier to cut down gradually. You will probably appreciate the flavour of food more afterwards.

## How can I improve the flavour of my food?

There are many ingredients available to add flavour to your food, here are just a few suggestions.

Basil	Add to tomato, lamb and beef dishes
Bay Leaves	Use in stocks and stews
Bouquet Garni	Use in stocks and stews
Chives	Add to cooked potatoes, salads, fish and chicken
Garlic	Use fresh garlic cloves or salt free garlic puree. These can be used in a variety of meat dishes and salads
Mint	Use when cooking potatoes and vegetables or make mint sauce to serve with lamb
Oregano	Add to casseroles of chicken, red meat and fish or in a tomato based sauce
Parsley	Use chopped parsley mixed with butter and lemon juice as a garnish for fish and steak
Peppercorns	Crush or grind over meat before cooking
Rosemary	Add to chicken or lamb before roasting



Tarragon	Use with chicken, fish and salads. A fresh sprig can be added to a bottle of olive oil for use in salad dressings
Thyme	Add to casseroles of beef or minced meat
Homemade stock	Boil the meat, poultry or fish carcass with celery, carrot and onion in water. Boil until the water has reduced by half. This can then be used as a base for soups and sauces. Alternatively, this can be frozen in portions and used at a later date.
Home-made gravy	Using the cooking juices from your meat, add a cup full of water or wine and your chosen herb. Stir thoroughly adding cornflour to thicken if required.

## Other dietary requirements

You have been asked to reduce your salt intake. If you have diabetes, coeliac disease, are following a weight reducing diet or have other dietary needs it is important that these diets continue. The dietitian will discuss this with you.

If you have been advised to reduce the amount of potassium in your diet, 'reduced salt' products and salt substitutes should be avoided. This is because salt substitutes are based on potassium e.g. Potassium Chloride

**The tables on the following pages list some high salt foods and some lower salt alternatives. Where possible, try to choose the lower salt foods to help you and your family keep to the recommended 6 g of salt per day.**

High salt foods	Lower salt alternatives
<p><b>Meat</b> Bacon, gammon, ham, tinned meats, corned beef and tongue</p>	<p>Fresh or frozen meat and poultry - beef, lamb, pork, mince, chicken and turkey and veal</p>
<p><b>Meat products</b> Meat paste, sausages, pre-prepared burgers, salami, wafer thin meat, black pudding, polony, doner meat, pre-prepared meat pies &amp; pastries</p>	<p>Homemade burgers and pies Shish kebabs</p>
<p><b>Fish</b> Smoked fish e.g. kippers, smoked haddock and smoked salmon Shellfish e.g. prawns, shrimps, mussels, crab and crabsticks Fish tinned in brine e.g. tuna Fish paste, taramasalata and anchovies</p>	<p>White fish e.g. cod, haddock and plaice Unsmoked oily fish e.g. salmon, trout and mackerel <b>Aim to have no more than 2 portions per week</b> Fish tinned in water, oil or tomato sauce e.g. tuna, sardines and pilchards Fish coated in breadcrumbs or batter</p>
<p><b>Beans and pulses</b> Ordinary baked beans</p>	<p>Reduced salt baked beans, kidney beans, butter beans, lentils, chick peas and haricot beans tinned in water</p>

High salt foods	Lower salt alternatives
<p><b>Dairy products</b>            Edam, Gouda and Stilton            Processed cheese e.g. slices and cheese spreads            Feta            Scotch eggs</p>	<p>Hard cheese e.g. Cheddar and Wensleydale            Aim to have no more than 4 oz (120 g) per week            Cream cheese, mascarpone, cottage cheese, ricotta and mozzarella            Fresh eggs</p>
<p><b>Snacks</b>            Salted and flavoured crisps, tortilla chips and Twiglets            Salted and dry roasted nuts            Savoury biscuits e.g. Tuc, Ritz and Cheddars            Bombay mix and chevra</p>	<p>Unsalted crisps e.g. Smith's 'Salt 'n' Shake'            Breadsticks            Unsalted and non-roasted nuts e.g. monkey nuts, walnuts, Brazil nuts and hazelnuts            Cream crackers, water biscuits, rice cakes, Matzo biscuits and plain unsalted popcorn</p>
<p><b>Cereals</b>            Cornflakes, All Bran, Cheerios, Special K and Branflakes            Naan bread            Super Noodles and Pot Noodles            Savoury rice</p>	<p>Shredded Wheat, Weetabix, Sugar Puffs, porridge and 'Reduced salt' supermarket own brands            Chapatis            Pasta, rice and noodles</p>

High salt foods	Lower salt alternatives
<p><b>Soups and sauces</b></p> <p>Tinned, packet and instant soups</p> <p>Stock cubes, gravy granules, beef and yeast extract e.g. Bovril and Marmite</p> <p>Soy sauce, Worcester sauce, barbecue sauce, tomato sauce, brown sauce, piccalilli, mango chutney, sweet pickle, Thai fish suace, smooth mustard, salad cream, “fat free” French dressing and thousand island dressing</p>	<p>Homemade soup using low salt stock</p> <p>Gravy made from meat juices and thickened with cornflour</p> <p>Low salt yeast extract e.g. Natex</p> <p>Low salt stocks e.g. Kallo</p> <p>Tomato puree, apple chutney, tomato chutney, mustard powder, regular French dressing, sour cream or mayonnaise-based dips and dressings</p>
<p><b>Seasoning</b></p> <p>Salt, sea salt, rock salt, garlic salt and celery salt</p>	<p>Pepper, vinegar, herbs, spices, garlic, lemon juice and chilli (see page 6)</p>
<p><b>Vegetables</b></p> <p>Vegetables tinned in brine</p> <p>Olives in brine</p>	<p>Fresh or frozen vegetables</p> <p>Vegetables tinned in water</p>

*Information contained in this booklet is correct at the time of printing, and is intended for your specific needs. It should not be passed on to anyone else. Manufacturers are continually changing the ingredients of their products and altering portion sizes. These changes may affect the sodium content of these foods.*

## Useful websites and reading

[www.kidney.org](http://www.kidney.org) - The National Kidney Foundation provides useful information on kidney disease, treatment and lifestyle

[www.kidneypatientguide.org.uk](http://www.kidneypatientguide.org.uk) - Kidney Care UK, offers advice and support for those living with kidney disease. Visit the Kidney Kitchen for recipe ideas

[www.beamfeelgood.com](http://www.beamfeelgood.com) - Kidney Beam helps people living with kidney disease to feel good through movement, education and wellbeing support

[www.patientview.org](http://www.patientview.org) - If you want to know your most recent blood levels, why not join PatientView? To see your blood test results, click on the 'I want to join' button, enter your details and select 'renal' speciality

**Eating Well for Kidney Health** - A practical guide and cookbook. H. Jackson, C. Green & G. James

Please ask your dietitian if you would like recipe ideas

If you have any suggestions or comments or queries regarding this leaflet please let your dietitian know.

<b>Dietitian</b>	<input type="text"/>
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# Personal Notes

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