



Patient Dietary Advice - Following a Low Salt Diet

What is sodium and why do I need to control it?

Sodium Chloride is commonly known as salt. In the body, sodium helps to regulate fluid balance and blood pressure. Healthy kidneys filter sodium and too much sodium in the body is removed when you go to the toilet to pass urine.

Salt is found naturally at low levels in all foods. It is also added to processed foods as well as extra salt being added by individuals at the table and in cooking. Reducing the amount of salt and salty foods you eat can also help to control your blood pressure.

If you have heart or kidney failure and have been advised to reduce your fluid intake by your doctor, following a low salt diet will help (salt makes you thirsty).

How much salt should we eat?

Most people consume too much salt. Recommended levels are less than six grams of salt per day; that's about 1 teaspoon of salt per day.

How can I reduce my salt intake?

Salt is found in a variety of foods and drinks. Salt and monosodium glutamate may be added as flavour enhancers or used to preserve foods in salt or brine. Processed foods are typically much higher in salt than fresh foods. You can reduce your salt intake easily by eating less processed food and using fresh ingredients with herbs and spices in your cooking. The following tips can help you to further reduce your salt intake:

Read the food labels

Many pre-packaged and processed foods have a traffic light system:

Green = Low in salt; Amber = Medium in salt; Red = High in salt.

If there is no traffic light system on the packaging, use the guide below to help you identify lower salt options. Packaging may use the word salt or sodium - each have different values. Make sure you check which one is on the nutrition information panel.

| Salt and sodium content of foods | | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| | Low | Medium | High |
| Salt content | Less than 0.3g/100g | Between 0.3-1.5g/100g | More than 1.5g/100g |
| Sodium content | Less than 0.1g/100g | Between 0.1- 0.6g/100g | More than 0.6g/100g |

Reduce foods high in salt

| Reduce intake | Better choices |
|---|---|
| Smoked and processed meat, such as bacon, ham, salami, sausages, pate | Fresh meat, such as chicken, turkey, lamb, pork and beef |
| Smoked, canned and salted fish, such as smoked cod and haddock, kippers, anchovies, fish paste | Fresh white fish, e.g. haddock, cod Fresh oily fish, e.g. mackerel, tuna and salmon Tinned fish in spring water |
| Foods canned in brine (salted water) | Choose unsalted, unflavoured varieties |
| Bread, rolls, chapatti, naan, pizza Savoury crackers | Lower salt options if possible (caution if you are following a low potassium diet – lower salt products may contain added potassium chloride as a salt substitute) |
| Breakfast cereals: Some cereals contain large amounts of salt - check the label | Choose lower salt options, such as porridge oats, puffed wheat, Shredded Wheat, Weetabix, Ready Brek |
| Salted snacks, such as crisps, salted popcorn | Unsalted crisps and snacks Unsalted/freshly prepared popcorn |
| Ready meals and takeaway meals Ready prepared soups, gravy mix and sauces Meat and yeast extract, e.g. Bovril and Marmite Table salt Ready prepared stock, soy sauce Salted margarine, butter, nut butters | Try to choose lower salt options: Ask if you can have your food unsalted (for example, no added salt to chips) Homemade food with no added salt Reduced salt stock and cubes Unsalted margarine/butter Reduced salt/salt free sauces (e.g ketchup) and tinned foods, such as tinned vegetables, baked beans etc. |

Use these cooking tips to reduce salt intake:

- Avoid adding salt when you are cooking food and remove the salt shaker from the table
- Use herbs, spices, pepper, chilli, mustard powder, garlic, vinegar and ginger to flavour food
- Citrus fruit can add flavour either in a marinade or squeezed over food
- Be careful with pre-made seasonings and cooking sauces (e.g. soy sauce) as these can be very high in salt
- Avoid salt substitutes, e.g. lo-salt, as this is made from potassium chloride and will affect your potassium levels
- Fancy salts, such as pink Himalayan, rock, garlic and celery salt have the same impact as regular salt

