

Cutting down on Salt



**An easy to follow guide with tools and tips
to help you cut down on salt, and improve
your health.**



Introduction

What you eat can have a big effect on your health.

Many people think about the fat or sugar that's in the foods they eat, but did you know that eating too much salt could put your health at risk?

Most people eat far more salt than they need. Eating too much salt can raise your blood pressure. Having high blood pressure increases your risk of a heart attack or stroke. So to help keep your heart healthy, you and your family should limit the amount of salt that you eat.

This booklet will give you the information you need to understand why it is important to reduce the salt in your diet and includes tips, ideas and tools to help you cut down on salt.

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Background

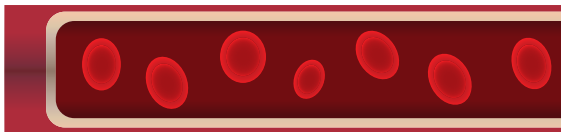
Eating too much salt can raise your blood pressure

Raised blood pressure puts more force against the walls of the blood vessels which transport oxygen-rich blood around your body.

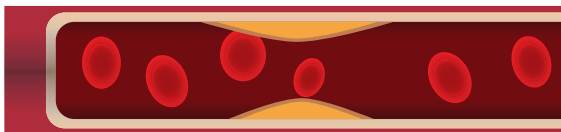
It is normal for your blood pressure to vary throughout the day, but if the pressure is constantly high, over time this extra strain can damage the blood vessel walls.

This makes them more likely to become stiff and narrowed by a buildup of fat. If this happens to the blood vessels in your heart or your brain, it puts you at risk of having a heart attack or a stroke.

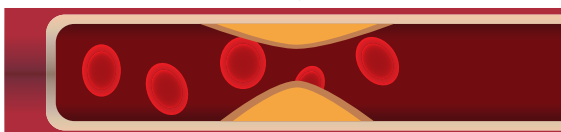
Healthy blood vessel



Blood vessel with some fatty build up



Blood vessel with severe fatty build up



How does salt raise my blood pressure?

When we talk about salt we mean sodium or sodium chloride, which is often called “table salt”.

Sodium occurs naturally in some foods, but the main source is salt added during food processing or during/after cooking. A high intake of sodium makes it harder for your kidneys to work properly and leads to extra fluid in your blood vessels. The extra fluid increases the pressure in your blood vessels, which leads to high blood pressure.

How much salt should I have?

The recommended maximum amount of salt for adults is 6g per day (or 3 g for children) – that’s about one level teaspoon.

This is referred to as the guideline daily amount or GDA.

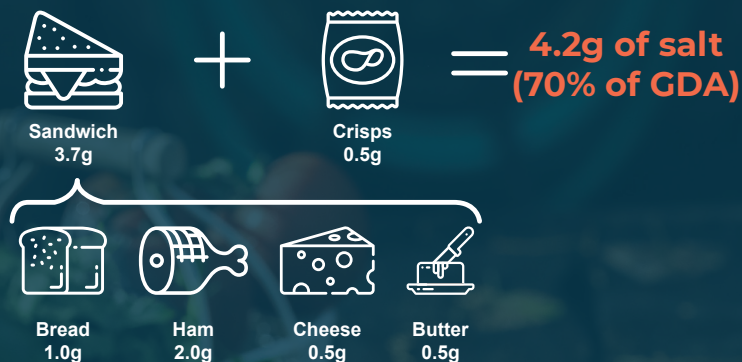


= 6g of salt

The limit of 6g includes the salt you add to your food and also the ‘hidden’ salt that is already in the foods you buy.

In the UK people typically eat too much salt, on average 8g each day.

A standard sandwich lunch could contain as much as 70% of your maximum daily amount of salt.





Cutting down on salt

Most of the salt we eat is already in the food when we buy it, for example in processed food. The best way to cut down on salt is to become aware of the salt that is in the foods you usually buy and to choose lower-salt alternatives.

Some foods are high in salt because of the way they are made. For example, salt is used to preserve processed meat and cheese, which means they are generally high in salt.

Foods such as bread and breakfast cereals can also contribute a lot of salt to our diet. Although they may contain only small amounts of salt, they contribute a lot because we eat them regularly.

Which foods are high in salt?

The following foods are often high in salt. To cut down on salt, try to eat them less often, have smaller amounts or swap to a lower salt option!

- stock cubes or gravy granules
- ready meals, pizzas and soups
- processed meat whenever possible, such as sausages, bacon, ham, burger patties or salami
- smoked meat and fish
- most kinds of cheese
- some bread and bread products such as crumpets, bagels and ciabatta
- some breakfast cereals
- tomato ketchup, mayonnaise, soy sauce and other table sauces
- pasta sauces
- crisps and salted or dry-roasted nuts
- anchovies, olives and pickles




Practical tips to help you cut down on salt



When shopping

- Look at the traffic light label on the foods and choose those that are **green** (low in salt), whenever possible or **amber** (medium) for salt and try to buy **red** (high-salt) foods only occasionally.
- The amount of salt in foods varies between brands and varieties of the same product, so compare nutrition labels on food packaging when buying everyday items. Look for foods with a **green** colour coding for salt. For the foods you regularly buy you only need to do this once as next time you will know which product to buy.
- For healthier snacks, choose fruit or vegetables such as carrot or celery sticks, or a pot of yoghurt. If you are going to have crisps or crackers, check the label and choose the ones lower in salt. Choose unsalted nuts rather than salted or dry roasted varieties.








	Low	Medium	High
Salt	0.3g or less	0.3 to 1.5g	More than 1.5g
% of adult reference intake	5%	5% to 25%	25% or more



75% of the salt we eat is already in everyday foods, such as bread, breakfast cereal and ready meals.



Swaps

-  Swap salt, stock cubes and soy sauce with herbs, spices and pepper.
-  Swap hard cheeses like cheddar with mozzarella, cream cheese or cottage cheese.
-  Choose cuts of meat like chicken breast over processed meat products like sausages and bacon.
-  Swap crisps and crackers with rice cakes.
-  Switch from mayonnaise, salami and cheese on your sandwich to cream cheese, egg and salad.
-  Go for unsalted nuts instead of the salty option.
-  Make your own amazing pasta sauce or salad dressing instead of using ready-made pasta sauces and salad dressings.



How to reduce salt at home

Lots of people add salt to food when they're cooking. But there are many ways to add flavour to your cooking without using any salt.

Before adding salt to your cooking try:

- Using different spices like paprika, curry or pepper.
- Adding a unique taste to foods by using fresh herbs, e.g. fish with parsley, potatoes with rosemary or salad with chives.
- Adding onions and/or garlic that can be added to almost every dish and give them a powerful flavour.
- Adding ginger, fresh or dried chillies if you like it a bit spicier.
- Adding lemon or lime for a zingy taste and some extra vitamin C.
- Baking or roasting vegetables to increase their flavour without the need for salt.

If after trying all this you still want to add salt or stock, choose the low-sodium option over the usual stock cubes.





How to reduce salt at the dinner table

- Avoid having the salt shaker on your table.
- Swap salty snacks like crisps with fresh or dried fruit and vegetables.
- Taste first! Before adding salt to your food, taste it. If you think it needs extra flavour, try adding different herbs, spices and pepper instead of salt.



How to reduce salt when eating out

Breakfast: As bacon and sausages are high in salt you should only eat them occasionally. If you have an English breakfast, choose boiled eggs instead of fried eggs with either bacon or sausage (not both).

Asian cuisine: Choose plain rice as it is lower in salt than stir-fried or egg-fried rice.

Italian cuisine: Avoid salty toppings like bacon, salami or anchovies and choose vegetables, cooked ham or sliced chicken instead. Choose pasta with tomato or cream sauce over cheese sauce or lasagne.

Sandwiches: Try cream cheese instead of mayonnaise. Avoid pickle and cured meat like ham, salami and pancetta.



Health Action Plan

When you're starting to make any changes to your eating habits or activities in daily life, it's important to take the time to think about why you want to do this, set yourself a goal and monitor your progress.

Research shows that if you do this, you are more likely to stay focussed and on track to reach your goal.

The activities in this workbook are easy to complete, and designed to only take a few minutes.



Set a goal



**Make an
action plan**



**Check your
progress**



Follow up



1. Set a goal

Think about why you want to make these changes. It will help you to stick to your action plan if you first spend a bit of time thinking about your motives for making changes and then keep looking back at them over the next few weeks.

The best goals are “SMART” – Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Realistic and Timed. Using this method can help you to set yourself achievable goals.

- **SPECIFIC** - Setting out exactly what you want to achieve gives you a clear target to aim for throughout your journey.
- **MEASURABLE** - If there's a way for you to measure your journey this is really helpful for keeping track of your progress, e.g. monitoring your blood pressure at home or at your GP practice, or keeping a chart of all the swaps and actions you have taken to reduce your salt intake. Be specific - how will you know when you have achieved your goal?
- **ACHIEVABLE** - Starting by giving yourself smaller, achievable goals to aim for is the best way to work towards reaching your long-term goals.
- **REALISTIC** - Being realistic about your goals and the resources that you have to complete them is important.
- **TIMED** – Think about when you can reasonably achieve this goal by; some changes will take longer than others for you to see the benefits.

Think about what you want to achieve, and write your goals down here.

How will you feel when you reach your goal?

Set a goal

	I want to...	Date started	How will I feel when I achieve this goal?	Date achieved
Example	<i>I want to find a lower salt option for three foods I eat regularly: bacon, pizza and cheese</i>	<i>01 Oct</i>	<i>Good, as I have taken the first step towards a healthier diet.</i>	
Goal 1				
Goal 2				
Goal 3				
Goal 4				



2. Make an action plan

Use this page to make your first action plan.

Action plans help you to decide exactly what you are going to do to reach your goal, and how and when you will do this. Thinking through and writing down an action plan to reach your goal makes it more likely you will do it!

Tip: if you're trying to make changes to your diet or lifestyle, try using the "three Rs" to set clear goals when making your action plan:

- **REPLACE** – try switching out unhealthy options for a healthier alternative (e.g. olive-oil spread in place of butter; or pick a healthier snack option like a portion of fruit or unsalted nuts instead of a bag of crisps or a biscuit).
- **REDUCE** – think about which foods you could reduce your portion sizes of, or set a goal to cut down.
- **REFRAIN** – are there any foods you now know are high in saturated fat or salt, that you are planning to hold back from eating at all? Or how about actions – e.g. not putting the salt shaker on the table at mealtimes?

Start date	Goal	Action plan (what? How? When?)
Example	I want to find lower salt options for foods that I usually eat	Every week I will find a lower salt option for food that I usually buy and will add the lower salt option to my shopping list
Week 1		
Week 2		
Week 3		
Week 4		



3. Check your progress

Taking 5 minutes each week to keep track of your progress can help to reinforce the changes you are making, and to recognise when you might need to ask for help or advice.

At the end of the week take the “5-minute challenge” and use this time to look back the goals in your action plan and think about what you have achieved.

Is there one area that you kept finding more difficult? What could you change to help you achieve your action plan next week? Use this to set yourself a new goal for next the week.

	Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3
Week 1	<div><input type="checkbox"/></div> <div><input type="checkbox"/></div>	<div><input type="checkbox"/></div> <div><input type="checkbox"/></div>	<div><input type="checkbox"/></div> <div><input type="checkbox"/></div>
What were the challenges of sticking to my action plan?			
What will I change for next week?			
Week 2	<div><input type="checkbox"/></div> <div><input type="checkbox"/></div>	<div><input type="checkbox"/></div> <div><input type="checkbox"/></div>	<div><input type="checkbox"/></div> <div><input type="checkbox"/></div>
What were the challenges of sticking to my action plan?			
What will I change for next week?			
Week 3	<div><input type="checkbox"/></div> <div><input type="checkbox"/></div>	<div><input type="checkbox"/></div> <div><input type="checkbox"/></div>	<div><input type="checkbox"/></div> <div><input type="checkbox"/></div>
What were the challenges of sticking to my action plan?			
What will I change for next week?			



4. Follow-up

Use this space to record your next check-up or appointment.

My next appointment is on:	With (GP / nurse / etc)
/ / at	
/ / at	
/ / at	
/ / at	

This booklet was developed based on research carried out at the University of Oxford's Nuffield Department of Primary Care Health Sciences, and was produced by the NIHR Applied Research Collaboration Oxford and Thames Valley.



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