**Reducing Salt Intake: A Simple Guide for People of African Descent in the UK**

**About the Author**

Jesse Enebi Usman is a dedicated advocate for health education and equity, with a deep commitment to making healthcare information accessible and impactful. This booklet, developed as part of his doctoral studies at Sheffield Hallam University, reflects Jesse’s focus on improving health outcomes and advancing equitable healthcare access, especially for underserved communities.

**Acknowledgments**

Special thanks to Sheffield Hallam University for supporting Jesse’s PhD research, which made this project possible. Sincere gratitude to Professor Markos Klonizakis, Professor Charmaine Childs, and Dr. David Rogerson for their mentorship and encouragement.

**Inside Front Cover - “Welcome” Message**

**Welcome!**

Thank you for picking up *Reducing Salt Intake: A Simple Guide for People of African Descent in the UK*. This guide was created specifically to support people of African descent in making informed choices to manage sodium intake. High blood pressure is a significant health concern for our community, and we hope this guide provides you with the tools you need to protect your health and well-being. From understanding the role of salt to practical tips on reducing intake without losing flavour, this booklet aims to offer clear, easy-to-follow guidance for healthier living.

**Contents (please add page numbers)**

Section 1: Understanding Salt and Health in the African Descent Community

- Salt and High Blood Pressure

- Cultural Influences on Diet

- Access to Healthy Food

Section 2: Identifying High-Salt Foods

- Traditional Dishes and Hidden Salt Sources

Section 3: Practical Tips for Reducing Salt

- Shopping for Lower-Salt Options

- Adding Flavour Without Salt

- Making Healthier Choices When Eating Out

Section 4: Creating Your Personal Salt Reduction Plan

- Setting Achievable Goals

- Taking Actionable Steps Towards Salt Reduction

- Tracking Progress and Seeking Support

**Section: Understanding Salt and Health in the African Descent Community**

Objective: Explain the impact of salt on health, specifically among people of African descent, and introduce practical changes.  
**Image Suggestion:** A simple infographic showing the effect of high salt intake on blood pressure and related health risks like heart disease and stroke.

**Salt and High Blood Pressure**

High blood pressure, also known as hypertension, is a medical condition that occurs when the force of blood pushing against the walls of your blood vessels is consistently too high. This can cause damage to the walls of your blood vessels over time, just like how high pressure can damage the walls of pipes.

One of the main reasons why blood pressure can become too high is because of excessive salt intake. When we eat too much salt, our kidneys do not work as well and are unable to remove the extra salt from our bloodstream. This causes an imbalance in our body's fluid levels, which increases the amount of blood in our arteries and raises our blood pressure.

The long-term effects of high blood pressure can be very serious and can lead to heart disease, stroke, and kidney damage. It is important to note that high blood pressure often does not show any noticeable symptoms, so it is crucial to have it checked regularly by a doctor. Therefore, reducing salt intake is very important for managing blood pressure and maintaining overall cardiovascular health.

**Cultural Influences on Diet**

Different cultures have unique ways of cooking and eating, and one of the most common ingredients used in many African and Afro-Caribbean cuisines is salt. From stews to jerk chicken, salt is used to bring out the rich flavours of these traditional dishes. Celebrations and social gatherings in these cultures are often marked by the presence of salty foods, which are an important part of their cultural identity and community bonding.

It is essential to understand that these culinary traditions are not just about food but are also deeply connected to a community's identity and history. So, reducing or changing the use of salt in these dishes can be a sensitive issue, as it might feel like a loss of cultural authenticity. However, it is possible to appreciate and preserve cultural heritage while still making healthier choices. People can use different spices and herbs to add flavour to their food and try new recipes that use less salt. It is all about finding a balance between honouring traditions and promoting good health.

**Access to Healthy Food**

In some places, people have trouble finding and buying fresh and healthy food that is affordable and easy to get. Because of this, they end up eating mostly processed and unhealthy foods that have a lot of salt. It is essential to help people have better access to healthy foods. We can do this by bringing more stores and markets that sell fresh food to areas where it is hard to find, or by encouraging farmers to grow and sell fresh fruits and veggies. We can also teach people how to cook healthy meals that do not cost a lot of money. By doing all of this, we can help people make better choices about what they eat, and that will make our communities stronger and healthier.

**Key Takeaway:** Recognising the importance of salt reduction for health, while respecting cultural preferences and dietary habits, is crucial for well-being.

**Identifying High-Salt Foods: Navigating Cultural Food Choices**

**Objective:** Help readers recognise high-salt foods, especially in culturally significant dishes.  
Image Suggestion: Photos or icons of common high-sodium ingredients (e.g., seasoning cubes, smoked meats, sauces) alongside lower-sodium alternatives.

**Traditional Dishes and Hidden Salt Sources**

Many African and Afro-Caribbean dishes are known for their rich and flavourful taste. However, most of these dishes contain high amounts of salt, which can be harmful to our health. In fact, many of these dishes have hidden sources of salt that we are not aware of. Here are some examples:

1. Soups and Stews: Many traditional African soups and stews, such as egusi soup or peanut stew, often contain seasoning blends that are high in salt.

2. Sauces and Condiments: Sauces like shito (a Ghanaian hot pepper sauce) or suya spice mix (a Nigerian seasoning blend) can also contain a lot of salt.

3. Preserved Meats: Certain traditional meats, such as biltong (South African dried meat) or jerky, undergo preservation processes that involve salting, contributing to their high sodium content.

4. Fermented Foods: Fermented foods like ogi (Nigerian fermented cereal pudding) or injera (Ethiopian sourdough flatbread) may contain hidden salt used in the fermentation process.

5. Seasoning Blends: Many African spice blends, such as berbere (Ethiopian spice blend) or yassa seasoning (Senegalese spice blend), may contain salt as a primary ingredient.

It is important to learn how to identify these hidden sources of salt, especially if we want to make healthier choices. One way to do this is by reading the ingredient lists of the foods we buy. Another way is by preparing dishes at home using fresh, whole ingredients instead of canned or processed foods.

Key Takeaway: Understanding where salt hides in traditional foods empowers you to make healthier choices without sacrificing flavour.

**Practical Tips for Reducing Salt**

**Objective:** Provide actionable advice on lowering salt intake in daily life, with a focus on shopping, cooking, and dining out.  
**Image Suggestion:** A checklist of shopping tips, herbs, and spices that can replace salt, or a comparison between high-sodium foods and their lower-sodium counterparts.

To maintain a balance between tradition and health, it is important to follow some practical tips for reducing salt intake. Here are some practical tips:

Opt for Lower-Salt Options when Shopping.

When you go grocery shopping, it is recommended that you choose fresh fruits and vegetables, lean meats, and whole grains. These foods are naturally low in sodium and contain essential nutrients. It is also essential to carefully read food labels and select products labelled "low sodium" or "no added salt." Planning meals ahead of time and cooking from scratch, using fresh ingredients and herbs and spices for flavour, can also help reduce salt intake.

Find Ways to Add Flavour Without Salt

Herbs and spices such as garlic, ginger, thyme, and others can be an excellent substitute for salt. They can add flavour to dishes without relying on salt. You can also try experimenting with citrus juices, vinegar, and homemade spice blends for seasoning. Trying out new recipes that use alternative ingredients and cooking techniques can also help reduce salt intake while preserving the flavours.

Make Healthier Choices When Eating Out

When dining out, it is crucial to search for restaurants that offer healthier options, such as grilled or steamed dishes. You can also request dressings and sauces on the side to control salt intake. Being mindful of portion sizes and sharing dishes with others can also help reduce salt intake.

Explore Different Cooking Techniques

In addition to the above tips, we can also explore different cooking techniques such as grilling, roasting, and baking, which can bring out the natural flavours of ingredients without adding salt. By adopting these tips, you can reduce your salt intake without compromising taste or your health.

**Key Takeaway:** Small changes like choosing fresh ingredients, reading labels, and using spices can significantly reduce your sodium intake.

**Creating Your Personal Salt Reduction Plan**

**Objective:** Guide readers to develop a tailored plan for salt reduction, including setting goals and tracking progress.  
**Image Suggestion:** A sample goal-setting template or a step-by-step visual guide to reducing salt over time.

**Setting Achievable Goals**

* Set specific and realistic goals for reducing salt intake, considering cultural preferences and traditions.

Reducing salt intake is an important step towards leading a healthy lifestyle. However, it can be quite a challenging task to accomplish. However, setting achievable goals can make the process easier and more manageable. When you decide to embark on this journey, it's important to set specific and realistic goals that align with your cultural preferences and traditions. For instance, if you are used to eating salty foods, it's not advisable to cut out salt completely all at once. Instead, start by reducing the amount of salt you add to your meals gradually. This will help your taste buds adjust to the new changes, and you'll be less likely to give up.

* Involve family members and friends in setting goals and supporting each other.

Involving your family and friends in the process can be a great source of encouragement and support. They can help you stay accountable and motivate you to keep going, even when the going gets tough. Sharing your goals with them and letting them know your progress can also inspire them to make healthier choices.

* Celebrate progress and milestones along the way.

celebrating your progress and milestones is crucial to staying motivated. When you hit a certain milestone, reward yourself with something you enjoy, like a movie or a day out with friends. This will help you stay on track and keep pushing towards your goal of a healthier lifestyle. Remember, it is not about being perfect, but progress. So, take it one step at a time, and before you know it, you will have achieved your goal of reducing salt intake.

**Taking Actionable Steps Towards Salt Reduction**

* Start by gradually reducing salt in cooking and at the table, and experiment with new recipes and flavours.

Reducing salt intake is a crucial step towards maintaining good health. To achieve this goal, there are some actionable steps that you can take. You can start by gradually reducing salt in your cooking and at the table. This can be done by using less salt in your recipes or by using alternatives such as herbs, spices, and other seasonings to add flavour to your meals. Additionally, you can experiment with new recipes and flavours to find the ones that work best for you.

- Explore culturally diverse salt-free seasonings and cooking techniques.

Another approach to reducing salt intake is to explore culturally diverse salt-free seasonings and cooking techniques. This can help you to discover new and exciting ways to flavour your food without adding salt. For example, you can try using lemon juice, vinegar, or other acidic ingredients to add tanginess to your dishes. You can also use salt-free seasoning blends, such as herbs de Provence or curry powder, to add depth of flavour to your meals.

- Find support from health professionals, community resources, and online communities.

It is important to note that reducing salt intake can be challenging, and it is important to find support along the way. You can seek support from health professionals, such as your doctor or a registered dietitian, who can provide guidance and advice on how to reduce your salt intake. Community resources, such as support groups or cooking classes, can also be helpful. Additionally, there are many online communities and resources that can provide information and support as you work towards reducing your salt intake.

Tracking Progress and Seeking Support

One of the best ways to reduce salt intake and improve overall health is to track your progress and seek support. Here are some tips to help you get started:

1. Keep a food diary: This is a great way to monitor your salt intake and track your progress towards your goals. Make note of the foods you eat and the amount of salt in each serving. You can also use a food diary to record your daily water intake, which is important for maintaining healthy blood pressure levels.

2. Seek support: It is important to have a support system in place to help you stay motivated and accountable. This can be family members, friends, or community resources like support groups. Consider sharing your goals with someone you trust and ask them to check in with you regularly. You can also seek out online communities or social media groups that focus on healthy eating and wellness.

3. Celebrate successes and learn from setbacks: It is important to acknowledge and celebrate your successes along the way. This will help you stay motivated and continue to make progress. However, setbacks are inevitable, so it's important to learn from them and use them as opportunities to improve. Don't be too hard on yourself if you slip up – just get back on track and keep moving forward.

**Key Takeaway:** Personalising your approach makes salt reduction achievable and sustainable, with support from family, friends, and community.

**Health Action Plan for Salt Reduction**

**Objective:** Outline a structured approach for readers to reduce salt, monitor their progress, and find support.  
**Image Suggestion:** A simple, easy-to-follow action plan layout with steps like "Set Goals," "Track Progress," and "Celebrate Successes."

Setting clear goals and taking actionable steps are important to reduce salt intake and improve overall health. Here is a simple health action plan that can be used by anyone who wants to reduce their salt intake:

1. Set Specific Goals:

- Decide how much salt you want to consume each day, and keep in mind that adults should aim to consume less than 6 grams of salt per day.

- Consider your food preferences and habits when setting goals to make them achievable and realistic.

2. Create an Actionable Plan:

- Start by finding out how much salt you're currently consuming and identify sources of hidden salt in your diet, such as processed foods or cooking methods.

- Plan your meals around fresh, whole foods and try to use lower-salt alternatives to traditional dishes that are culturally appropriate.

- Experiment with different cooking techniques and flavourings, like herbs, spices, or citrus, to reduce the need for salt.

- Make time for meal preparation and cooking to ensure that healthier options are readily available and convenient.

3. Track Your Progress:

- Keep a diary of the food you eat every day and note how much salt you consume to monitor your progress.

- Regularly check food labels and nutritional information to make informed choices when grocery shopping.

- Use a blood pressure monitor to track changes in your blood pressure levels over time as you reduce salt intake.

4. Seek Support and Accountability:

- Tell your friends and family about your goals and progress to get support and encouragement from them.

- Consider joining a support group or online community focused on salt reduction and cardiovascular health to connect with others facing similar challenges.

- Talk to a healthcare professional, like a nutritionist, for personalised guidance and advice on managing salt intake and improving overall health.

5. Regular Follow-Up and Adjustment:

- Check in with yourself regularly to review your progress and adjust your action plan as needed.

- Celebrate your achievements and milestones along the way to stay motivated and committed to your salt reduction goals.

- Be flexible and open to making changes to your plan based on feedback and new information. Continuously strive for improvement in your dietary habits and overall well-being.

**Salt Reduction Goal-Setting and Tracking Templates**

In addition to the action plan above, please see the templates in the appendix to help you set achievable goals, monitor your daily progress, and make gradual changes toward a lower-sodium lifestyle.

**Key Takeaway:** An action plan provides a clear roadmap to success and helps maintain motivation.

Appendixes

## 1. Goal Setting Template

Set specific and achievable goals to reduce your salt intake. Use the table below to document your goals, target dates, and progress check dates. Mark '✔' upon completion.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Goal | Target Date | Progress Check Date | Completed (✔) |
| E.g. reduce salt in cooking by 50% | 1 month from today | 2 weeks from today |  |
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## 2. Daily Tracking Log

Track your salt usage and note any substitutions with herbs or spices.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Date | Food/Dish | Salt Used | Herbs/Spices Substituted |
| 2024-11-08 | Egusi Soup | 1 tsp | Thyme, garlic |
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## 3. Weekly Reflection and Adjustments

Use the following table to reflect on your weekly progress and make necessary adjustments.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Reflection Area | Notes |
| What went well this week? |  |
| What challenges did I face? |  |
| What adjustments can I make for next week? |  |

**Inside Back Cover - Final Thoughts**

**Final Thoughts**  
Making positive changes in our health begins with small steps. Reducing salt is one of the most impactful actions you can take to lower your blood pressure and protect your heart and kidneys. This guide offers practical tips and guidance for balancing tradition and health, empowering you to make healthier choices for yourself and your family. Together, let’s work toward a healthier future.

**Resources and Further Information**

To learn more about salt, health, and culturally sensitive dietary advice, explore the following resources:

* **British Heart Foundation:** [www.bhf.org.uk](https://www.bhf.org.uk)
* **World Hypertension League:** [www.worldhypertensionleague.org](https://www.worldhypertensionleague.org)
* **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) - Sodium Facts:** [www.cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov/salt/)
* **National Health Service (NHS) - Salt and Your Diet:** [www.nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/food-types/salt-in-your-diet/)
* **HEARTS AFRICA:** www.heartsafrica.org

### Back Cover Description

**Back Cover Summary:**  
This booklet offers practical, culturally sensitive advice on reducing salt intake for people of African descent in the UK. Designed to address high blood pressure and related health risks, it provides step-by-step guidance on spotting hidden salt, making healthy swaps, and creating a personal salt reduction plan. With tips tailored for traditional cuisines, this guide empowers you to take control of your health without compromising flavour. Join us in making small changes that can have a big impact on your health and future.