

OxSalt

Lowering Salt for Health



A guide to reducing salt in our diet

How to Reduce Salt in our Diet

What is salt?

Salt is a chemical made up of sodium and chloride. Food labels should state how much salt is in the food, but sometimes only mention the sodium. Rock salt, sea salt and garlic salt all have the same salt content as table salt.



Why reduce the amount of salt in our diet?

Many studies have shown that reducing the amount of salt in our diet can lower blood pressure. This can happen as quickly as 4 weeks after reducing the level of salt.

High blood pressure is the single biggest risk factor for stroke. People with high blood pressure are three times more likely to develop heart disease or suffer a stroke.

By lowering our salt intake we can reduce the risk of having strokes or heart attacks. High blood pressure is also bad for kidneys so lowering salt intake is good for our kidneys.

Reducing salt in our diet is recommended by the NHS, the British Heart Foundation, the British Renal Association, the British Hypertension Society, NICE and your own local doctors, nurses and dieticians.

How much salt is too much?

It is important to know how much salt is in what we eat, so that we know what changes to make to lower our salt intake.

As much as 75% of the salt in our diet comes from processed foods. As consumers we need to understand food labelling and

know the recommended maximum daily salt intake or guideline daily amount of salt (GDA).

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) recommends that we take in **no more than 6 grams of salt per day** and wants this recommendation to fall to 3 grams per day in the future.

Remember that any reduction in salt intake is good for you, so even small changes to your diet are well

worth making.

A good plan is to try reduce your salt intake below 6 g, but if you can reduce it further that is even better.

less than
6 g

What are the main sources of salt?

The main sources of salt from foods in the UK diet are:

- **processed meats e.g. bacon, ham and sausages**
- **ready meals**
- **jars of cook-in sauces**
- **pizzas**
- **crisps and other savoury snacks**
- **bread**
- **cereal grain products e.g. breakfast cereals**



Although some of these products may not seem high in salt, when they are eaten frequently, or in large quantities, the amount of salt can add up. Remember to check the food labels. The salt content of bread varies and bread can be made without salt – you can do this easily yourself with a breadmaker.



Does less salt mean less taste?

When we reduce the salt in our diet our taste buds soon adapt to taste other flavours in the food. Less salty food may taste slightly bland at first, but once our taste buds have adjusted the natural flavours of the foods start to come through more and most people really enjoy this.

It is also possible to add other flavouring, such as herbs, spices, lemon, garlic and ginger. Chilli and curry powders are another way of adding additional flavour to food. Salt is only added to make food taste salty – we can cook food perfectly well without it.

Most people find that once they have reduced the salt in their diet, then food with lots of salt in it tastes very salty. In this way our bodies can really help us to make healthier choices.



Is too little salt dangerous?

Salt occurs in food naturally and is present in almost everything that we eat. We don't need any extra salt. Our bodies are good at regulating salt levels and you would not be in this study if your doctor felt that your body was not able to do this.

Do we need more salt if it is hot or if we exercise?

When we exercise normally or when it is hot, our body regulates our salt levels naturally and we don't have to supplement it beyond what is already in the food we eat. However, it is important to drink properly when you exercise to avoid dehydration.

What do food labels tell us?

Most processed foods have a nutritional panel somewhere on the packaging. This includes information about how much salt is in the food. The amount of salt is usually shown **per 100 grams** and sometimes per portion of the food. The panel may also show the what percentage of the maximum guideline daily allowance (**GDA**) of salt is in the food.

Some food labels use the traffic light system to help us make healthier choices. The traffic light system gives information on salt as well as fat, sugar and calories, labelling **red** for high, **amber** for medium and **green** for low content. Choosing foods with more green and amber than reds, helps us make healthier choices.



Nutrition				
Typical values (as consumed)	per 100g	per pack	%GDA	your GDA*
Energy	541kJ/128kcal	2011kJ/476kcal	24%	2000kcal
Protein	4.9g	18.2g		
Carbohydrates	20.8g	77.4g		
of which sugars	1.5g	5.6g	6.2%	90g
Fat	2.8g	10.4g	15%	70g
of which saturates	2.3g	8.6g	43%	20g
Fibre	2.1g	7.8g		
Sodium	0.1g	0.5g		
Salt equivalent	0.3g	1.3g	22%	6g
*Recommended guideline daily amounts for adults (GDA)				



What if a food label only mentions sodium?

If a food label only mentions sodium then we need to work out how much salt that is.

To convert sodium to salt we multiply by 2.5.

Examples

1 gram of sodium = $1 \times 2.5 = 2.5$ grams of salt

2 grams of sodium = $2 \times 2.5 = 5$ grams of salt

What if a food label uses milligrams (mg)?

If a food label gives the sodium or salt content in milligrams (mg), then we need to work out how many grams (g) of sodium or salt this is.

There are 1000 milligrams in a gram, so we divide the number of milligrams by 1000.

Examples

600 mg of salt = $600 \div 1000 = 0.6$ g of salt

3000 mg of sodium = $3000 \div 1000 = 3$ g of sodium

How much salt is in my portion?

Sometimes food labels tell us how much salt or sodium is in the whole tin or packet. However, sometimes they tell us how much is in 100g of the food.

We need to work out how much salt is in the amount of food that we eat.

It can be useful to remember that 100 g is about 4 ounces.

Examples

If a food has 1.5 g of salt in 100 g of the food and we eat 200 g of the food then we have eaten

$1.5 \times 2 = 3$ g of salt.

If a food has 4 g of salt per 100g and we eat 50 g of the food then we have eaten

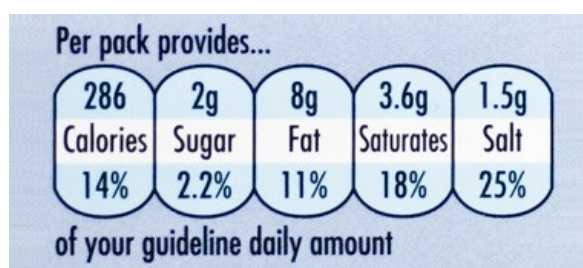
$4 \div 2 = 2$ g of salt.

There are salt calculators on the OxSalt website

General advice on food labels

Sometimes it is difficult to work out how much salt we are getting in the food, but remember the following from the 'traffic light' system of red, amber and green colouring.

This is a LOT (per 100g)	This is MODERATE (per 100g)	This is a LITTLE (per 100g)
Over 1.25g salt or 0.5g sodium	0.25 – 1.25g salt or 0.1g – 0.5g sodium	Under 0.25g salt or 0.1g sodium



Simple first steps to lower salt

1. Don't have salt on the table – consider using pepper instead
2. Don't add salt during cooking – use other flavours instead
3. Check the salt content of food you buy and avoid high-salt food



Is it a good idea to use salt substitutes?

No, it is not a good idea to use salt substitutes (e.g. Losalt) as these usually contain potassium chloride which can be harmful for people with kidney problems. Also salt substitutes still contain a significant amount of salt.

Salt substitutes block the natural adjustment in taste that happens

when we lower our salt intake. This adjustment helps us to taste how very salty some foods are and so learn to avoid them.

Overall, it is much better to reduce salt levels properly and let the natural flavour of food shine through.

Can I eat out or have a Take-Away?

Most food made in restaurants or sold as take-away food is high in salt.

The key issue is how often we eat such food. Ask yourself how often do you eat out? If it is to celebrate a special occasion every few months, then go out and enjoy it. If you eat out or have take-aways more frequently then try to follow these guidelines to make salt-wise choices:



- Skip the starter or choose low salt options, such as melon or salad
- Ask for dressings, sauces or gravies to be served separately and only add a small amount
- Ask if dishes can be cooked with less salt, most restaurants are happy to cater for special dietary requirements
- Try to avoid processed meat or fish such as gammon, bacon, smoked fish or fish in crumbs/batter
- Don't be tempted by the cheese board!



Top Tips

- Try NOT to add salt at the table or in cooking.
- Use black pepper, herbs and spices to flavour food instead of salt
- Cut down on processed foods such as bacon, sausages, cheese and any canned food containing salt.
- Try Salt & Shake crisps without adding the salt as an alternative to crisps.
- Make gravy the traditional way, using the vegetable water, meat juices and gravy browning.
- Cook your food from fresh so you know exactly what has gone into the dish.
- Choose vegetable or chicken toppings on pizza instead of pepperoni, bacon or extra cheese.
- Use black pepper instead of salt on pasta and scrambled egg
- Roast vegetables like red pepper, fennel, butternut squash and parsnips to bring out their flavour.
- Try porridge for breakfast – without salt!
- Marinade meat and fish in advance to give them more flavour.
- Check and compare the food labels on products as different brands may vary.
- Plan meals so you can cook extra to take for lunch the next day.
- Cook in batches and freeze extra portions to save time when you need a quick meal.
- Try a jacket potato instead of chips.
- Choose tinned pulses and vegetables without added salt.
- Add slices of tomato to food instead of ketchup.
- When buying sandwiches and ready meals, choose ones with less than 1.25 g salt (0.5 g sodium) per meal.
- Reducing salt intake is good for everyone – get all your household to join in.
- If you buy lunch at work many sandwiches and snacks are high in salt. Bringing your own lunch will be healthier and probably cheaper too!

There is more information and advice on the OxSalt website
<https://cocallag.github.io/oxsalt/>

Quick Reference Guide

	Try to AVOID	Try these INSTEAD
Meat	Processed meats e.g Bacon Ham Gammon Sausages Pork pies Beef burgers Salami Corned beef Meat pate/ paste	Plain fresh or frozen meat e.g Chicken Turkey Lamb Beef Pork
Fish	Fish tinned in brine Smoked fish Fish pate/ paste Shellfish Fish in crumbs or batter	Plain fresh or frozen fish Fish tinned in spring water or oil
Vegetables	Tinned vegetables Baked beans	Fresh or frozen vegetables Reduced salt baked beans
Dairy	Cheese spread	Cheese: limit portion to 4oz (100g)/ week Cottage cheese Cream cheese e.g Philadelphia
Savoury snacks	Crisps Salted nuts Dry roasted nuts Salted snacks e.g. Twiglets, tortilla chips, Cheddars, Ritz, Tuc	Plain unsalted crisps e.g Salt'n'Shake (discard the salt) Unsalted nuts Unsalted popcorn Crispbreads e.g. Ryvita Cereal bars, Rice cakes
Miscellaneous	Marmite, Bovril Stock cubes, Oxo Bisto Gravy granules Tinned / packet soup Tinned spaghetti Pot noodles	Reduced salt stock cubes/ gravy browning Homemade soup with no added salt Fresh/dried pasta, noodles