

Some commonly asked questions about salt and it's intake

What are some of the foods we regularly buy that are high in salt ?

Foods where some brands / recipes are high in salt

- Baked beans
- Breakfast cereals
- Bread products such as crumpets, bagels and ciabatta
- Cooking and pasta sauces
- Crisps
- Pizza
- Ready meals
- Soup
- Sandwiches
- Sausages
- Tomato ketchup, mayonnaise and other sauces

Foods that are often high in salt

- Anchovies
- Bacon
- Cheese
- Chips (if salt added)
- Gravy granules
- Ham
- Olives
- Pickles
- Prawns
- Salami
- Salted and dry roasted nuts
- Salt fish
- Smoked meat and fish
- Soy sauce
- Stock cubes
- Yeast extract

It's all very well looking at the ingredients when we shop but that could take a huge amount of time

It is best to buy fresh food without flavouring added to it and season it yourself with herbs, spices and other natural condiments and (if still required) very small amount of good quality natural salt
supermarkets are under obligation to list ingredients like salt

traffic light system – red – amber – green

look at amount of salt per 100 gm – if higher than 0.6 g – high salt content food, if lower than 0.6 g – fairly low

if listed as sodium you need to multiply by 2.5 to get the salt content

DONT FORGET TOTAL AMOUNT OF SALT CONSUMED WILL VARY DEPENDING ON THE QUANTITY OF THE FOOD YOU CONSUME

Is it worth cutting salt out altogether from our diets?

According to Chinese medicine salt has grounding and cooling properties, so used properly can be quite helpful, especially in cold climates or during colder seasons like late autumn or winter – our bodies seem to naturally recognise that fact and often people find they are more drawn to salty dishes during those periods. Salt helps by cooling of the exterior of our body and concentrating the heat inside during cold months.

Salt can also act as an appetite stimulant, which is why in Asian traditions small amounts of pickles are served at the beginning of the meal to stimulate the flow of digestive juices.

It also has detoxifying and purifying properties – can remove some of the toxicity of poor quality foods

Used appropriately salt can enhance utilisation of calcium and other nutrients

A person who engages in a lot of physical activity that results in sweating, either through work or sport activities, generally needs a bit more salt than someone who is inactive, but this does not necessarily have to be achieved by adding salt to food. Such a person also needs to replace their potassium levels at the same time as these get depleted as well.

Because salt has alkalisating properties it can help balance acid-forming foods such as beans, peas, grains and meats. If added to already sodium-rich foods such as meats, it can easily result in overconsumption of sodium.

Salt is an antidote to all sorts of radiation, including electromagnetic radiation emitted by computers and all sorts of electrical devices

Salt can be a useful antidote for fainting and dizziness, especially if caused by low blood pressure because of its hypertensive (blood-pressure increasing) properties

What tips can you give to try to cut down?

Cook as much food from scratch as possible and avoid ready-made meals

Always check the labels when buying processed food and ready-made meals

Increase fruit and vegetable intake for extra potassium and decrease animal products (especially already processed ones like bacon, ham and other luncheon or smoked meats that have salt added to them)

Excess refined sugar and alcohol intake encourages overconsumption of salt, and vice versa, as according to Chinese medicine these are the opposite ends of the scale and excess intake of one will produce cravings for the other. Try to satisfy sweet cravings using natural foods such as fruit, roasted vegetables, well-chewed whole-grains and small quantities of quality sweeteners such as maple or rice syrup, molasses, honey, etc.

Make your own salad dressings and sauces for dishes that you prepare so that if you do add salt you can control the amount that goes in

Eat porridge made from oats or other wholegrains (rice, quinoa, millet) instead of commercial cereals which nearly always have salt and sugar added to them

Don't add any salt to your food while you cook it or before you try it. Try to flavour mainly with natural ingredients like herbs, spices, lemon juice, etc and only add small amount of salt if you are still not satisfied with the flavour.

If using tinned products look for varieties without added salt or try to rinse out salt where possible (e.g. cooked beans and pulses)

Give yourself time to get used to having less salt in your food – your tastebuds will adjust after a little while if you are persistent.

What about other ways of flavouring our food without adding salt?

Use Gomasio flavouring, which is made from ground-up sesame seeds that were previously soaked in salty water and then roasted, instead of pure salt

Herbal “salts” made from different mixtures of herbs and ingredients like celery seeds (e.g. Vogel's Herbamare)

Using foods that are naturally high in sodium instead of salt. These include: celery, seaweeds and other seafoods

A good seaweed product that I recommend is something called Seaweed Culinary Ingredient and is available either as powder or granules that you can grind into your food and is made by a company called Seagreens

Using fresh herbs, garlic and a variety of spices like ginger, black pepper, turmeric, cumin, coriander seeds, cinnamon, nutmeg and so on can produce a variety of interesting flavours

Pesto or dry tomato products can also be used to intensify flavours. Those usually do contain salt but because they are used in small quantities they are usually still a better choice

Is there any type of salt that is good for you?

Most salt that is available commercially is very heavily processed and lost most of the health benefits of natural salt that I have mentioned earlier, so I would not recommend it at all.

Furthermore, I am also convinced that the bad reputation that salt has earned itself over the years is to a large extent related to the processing it undergoes nowadays. If salt is to be used it should be as close to natural form as possible.

Personally Himalayan Crystal Salt is my favourite and many complementary health therapists believe it is a roll-royce of all salt products, as it is rich in many trace minerals not easily available from other sources.

How can high levels of salt in our body affect our health?

Maximum levels of salt for different age groups are as follows:

Babies: NONE IS BEST – salt is not suitable for babies and can damage their kidneys

There was at least one case reported in the UK press in the last few years of ignorant parents who caused the death of their baby by feeding them unsuitable products like tinned foods, etc. which are usually quite high in salt

1-3 year old	– 2 g a day (or 0.8 g sodium)
4-6 year old	– 3 g a day (or 1.2 g sodium)
7 – 11 year old	– 5 g a day (or 2 g sodium)
11 plus	– 6 g a day (or 2.4 g sodium)

MANY HEALTH EXPERTS BELIEVE THAT EVEN THOSE LEVELS ARE TOO HIGH AND SHOULD BE LOWERED

Excess salt can contribute to:

- water retention and weight problems
- excessive appetite
- cancer development
- stomach ulcers and stomach cancers
- high blood pressure and resulting arterial damage and / or clotting
- kidney damage
- intrerferes with the absorption of nutrients and depletes calcium levels
- overactive thyroid, as commercial salt normally has iodine added to it
- dehydration

Resources for buying alternative salt products to be added shortly – check here again in a little while