



Cut down on salt

How does eating salt affect my heart?

Eating too much salt can raise your blood pressure. High blood pressure puts added force against the walls of your arteries (the blood vessels that carry blood towards your heart).

Over time this extra pressure can damage the arteries, which makes them more likely to become narrowed and hardened by fatty deposits. When this happens to your coronary arteries (the arteries that supply your heart muscle with oxygen-rich blood) this is coronary heart disease, which can lead to angina and heart attack.

Watch our animation to find out how and why you should cut down on salt at bhf.org.uk/heart-matters-magazine/nutrition/sugar-salt-and-fat/hold-the-salt

But my blood pressure's fine!

Anyone can develop high blood pressure and it's very hard to tell if you have it because it rarely makes people feel ill – so even if you think your blood pressure is fine you should still limit the amount of salt you eat. Eating a balanced diet with plenty of fruits and vegetables, being physically active, not being overweight and limiting how much alcohol you drink can also help reduce your risk of developing high blood pressure.

If you've been diagnosed with low blood pressure (hypertension), talk to your doctor about how to manage your salt and fluid intake.

How much salt is good for me

It is recommended that adults should not eat more than 6g of salt a day that's about one level teaspoon. It's not just the salt that you add to your meal during cooking or at the table that is included.



The salt which is already 'hidden' within many everyday foods, counts too. The average adult in the UK consumes a massive 8g of salt each day. The good news is that there are some really simple steps you can take to reduce your salt intake and improve your long-term health.

Where's the salt?

Around three quarters of the salt we eat has already been added to our food before we buy it, which means it can be difficult to tell how much salt you're eating.

Most people already know that foods like crisps and processed foods are high in salt, but you might be surprised how much salt is in everyday foods that don't taste salty – such as cereal, breads, biscuits and cakes. If you eat these foods often, the amount of salt you're eating can really add up.

See our list of surprisingly salty foods at bhf.org.uk/heart-matters-magazine/nutrition/sugar-salt-and-fat/salty-surprises

The amount of salt varies between brands so it's important to use food labels to help you choose the healthier options. Use food labels to help you choose lower-salt ingredients and meals.





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Always read the label

The easiest way to work out how much salt you're eating is to check the food label (nutritional information) on the packaging.

Read our top 10 tips for understanding food labels at [bhf.org.uk/heart-matters-magazine/nutrition/sugar-salt-and-fat/10-tips-for-understanding-food-labels](https://www.bhf.org.uk/heart-matters-magazine/nutrition/sugar-salt-and-fat/10-tips-for-understanding-food-labels)

Colour – coded front of pack labelling

Some food labels have colour coding which tells you at a glance how much salt there is in your food.

Red = high in salt

Amber = Medium salt

Green = Low in salt

Per portion

When you're looking at how much salt is in your food, make sure you know whether you're looking at the amount of salt 'per portion' or the amount 'per 100g'.

Reference Intake (RI)

Reference intakes are useful guidelines on the amount of energy and nutrients you need for a healthy balanced diet each day. The RI for salt is 6g. The % RI tells you how much of your daily maximum is in the portion of the food. To avoid going over your RI try to avoid products that contain 40% or more of an adult's GDA in one portion.

Sodium

You might see salt written as sodium on a food label. Sodium is just another way of talking about the salt content of food. It's measured differently to salt. If you can only see a listing for sodium on a food label, you can work out how much salt is in the product by multiplying the sodium (in grams) by 2.5.

Salt = sodium x2.5g

	Low: a healthier choice	High: just occasionally
Salt	0.3g or less	1.6g or more
Sodium	0.1g or less	0.6g or more

Top tips for passing the salt

Adding salt to your food can seem like a hard habit to break. Here are some tips to get you started. You'll be surprised how quickly your taste buds adapt.

In the kitchen

- Try cooking without salt or adding less salt to your cooking when boiling vegetables and making casseroles and sauces.
- Use spices and herbs to flavour foods rather than salt. This works really well even with foods such as potatoes, pasta, rice and couscous.
- Citrus fruits such as lemons and limes can add a zesty kick to fish, chicken and pork. Use them as a marinade with olive oil and garlic or simply squeeze the juices over your meal.
- Watch out for cooking sauces (especially soy sauce) and ready mixed 'seasonings' which can be very high in salt. If you're not sure how salty they are, check the label.
- Don't throw away your salt-free vegetable cooking liquid. Use it for gravies, soups, stews and sauces, instead of salty stock cubes.

More information on how to use natural salt alternatives with meat, fish and vegetables at [bhf.org.uk/heart-matters-magazine/nutrition/herbs-and-spices](https://www.bhf.org.uk/heart-matters-magazine/nutrition/herbs-and-spices)

At the table

- Banish the salt pot from your table.
- Taste your food before you season it. If it needs that little something extra, try adding pepper or fresh herbs instead.
- Switch salty snacks for fruit and vegetables – fresh, dried, tinned in natural juices all count. Aim for at least five portions a day

At the shops

When shopping compare nutrition labels for everyday foods like bread, cereals, cakes or pizza and swap them for lower salt alternatives.

Buy tinned vegetables and pulses without added salt.

Go for reduced salt unsmoked back bacon. Cured meats and fish can be high in salt so try to eat them less often.

Check the labels on soy sauce, ketchup, mustard, pickles, mayonnaise and other table sauces which can all be high in salt.