



Salt



Health



Wellness



Nutrition



Support

Introduction

Many of us eat too much salt in our diets. A high intake of salt or sodium is related to high blood pressure, which increases the risk of a heart attack and stroke.

Salt is made up of two chemicals: chloride and sodium. It's the sodium that needs our attention as too much can cause overeating and high blood pressure.

We do need some sodium in our diet to help maintain body and cell function, but eating too much is extremely common - especially for those of us who eat lots of takeout, processed and pre-packaged foods.

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What foods are high in salt and sodium?

Many everyday foods are not obviously salty, but they can contain large amounts of 'hidden salt'. Around 75 per cent of salt in our diet is added to the food before it reaches the supermarket shelves. This is added during processing and manufacturing for added flavour and to increase shelf life. Salt could also be added to food during cooking and can also be found naturally in some foods.

The recommended daily salt intake for adults is less than 6g per day, or one teaspoon. Because most of the salt in our diet comes from packaged foods, these are the products we need to check more carefully.

Tinned and pre-prepared meals can often contain between 5 to 15 grams of salt on their own - and that's before we've eaten anything else during the day.

Foods to check the salt content for:

- Ready meals and takeaway meals
- Tinned soups
- Jars of pasta sauce
- Tinned food containing salt e.g. baked beans
- Processed meat products e.g. as ham, bacon, sausages, pate or salami
- Ready-made and powdered soups and pot snacks
- Ketchup, soy sauce, mayonnaise and pickles
- Snacks such as crisps, nuts, biscuits, or popcorn

Salt and health

Blood pressure

High blood pressure, or hypertension, is very common in the UK and affects one in four adults. If left untreated, hypertension can increase the risk of heart attacks and strokes, as well as causing damage to the kidneys and eyes.

The kidneys help control blood pressure by taking water out of the bloodstream. Too much sodium means the water is pulled back into the bloodstream. More water in your bloodstream causes an increase in blood pressure.

High blood pressure means the heart works harder to pump blood around the body. Over time, this makes the blood vessels lose their stretchiness and become stiff and narrow. This makes it easier for fat to clog them up. If the blood vessels that carry blood to the heart or brain get damaged and clogged, it can lead to a heart attack or stroke.

Weight gain

Salt does not have any calories so it's not directly responsible for weight gain. Instead, salt affects our food choices by causing thirst and hunger. This can lead us to choose readily available snacks and fizzy drinks to satisfy us. These choices can lead to increased calories, sugars and fats that could contribute to weight gain.

Reducing salt

There are many simple ways you can reduce your salt intake:

- ✓ Remove salt from the table to avoid adding extra salt to your meals.
- ✓ Instead of salt, try adding black pepper, herbs, spices, and lemon juice when seasoning.
- ✓ Swap ready-made or processed snacks, sandwich fillers and meals for healthier, homemade options.
- ✓ Check the food labels and choose between different brands and varieties for lower salt options.
- ✓ Try using reduced salt stock cubes.
- ✓ Switch salty snacks like crisps for unsalted popcorn.
- ✓ Choose unsalted nuts instead of salted nuts.
- ✓ Swap salty, processed meats like bacon and sausages for white meats like chicken or turkey.
- ✓ Buy tinned vegetables and beans without added salt.
- ✓ Be careful with soy sauce, brown sauce, mayonnaise and ketchup as these can all be high in salt.

Final thought

Natural foods that have limited processing will be naturally lower in salt and a better choice for our health. Cooking from ingredients and limiting fast food and takeaways will help.

If you would like to learn more or require more information and support, please get in touch!

Telephone: 01942 496496

Email: wellbeing@bewellwigan.org

Website: bewellwigan.org

