

Dangers of eating too much salt

It's Salt Awareness Week (20 to 26 March). The Public Health Agency (PHA) is reminding everyone of the dangers of eating too much salt and asking everyone to check food labels to see how much salt is in food.

High blood pressure

Too much salt in your diet can contribute to [high blood pressure](#) – also known as hypertension.

Hypertension often has no symptoms, but if you have the condition, you are more likely to develop heart disease or have a [stroke](#).

A very small amount of salt is an essential part of your diet. However, often without realising it, most of us are eating too much.

It is recommended that adults eat no more than six grams of salt a day (about a teaspoon) and children should have even less.

Using less salt

You can take greater control by simply using less salt during cooking and tasting food at the table before adding [salt](#), rather than doing this automatically.

However, it is important to realise that 75 per cent of the salt you eat is already in the food you buy.

Ready prepared and processed foods can be high in salt. For example, a tin of cream of chicken soup can contain 1.9g of salt – almost a third of the recommended daily amount in just one tin.

Ready meals and snack foods, such as crisps, in particular can be very high in salt. By reading product labels before you buy, you can choose the products that are lower in salt and better for your health.

'Traffic light' food labels

If a product uses the 'traffic light' indicators on its packaging, try to go for products marked green or amber for salt content, and stay clear of products marked red for salt.

For foods that don't use red, amber and green labels, more than 1.5g salt per 100g is high in salt; between 0.3g and 1.5g has medium salt content; and 0.3g salt or less per 100g is low in salt.

Reducing the amount of salt you use in cooking doesn't necessarily mean less flavoursome meals. You can replace salt with alternative flavourings such as pepper, lemon juice, herbs, and spices.

The PHA's [Choose to Live Better](#) website has further advice and tips on eating well and getting active.

Salt tips

Read the salt content on the label – look at the amount of salt per 100g:

- more than 1.5g salt per 100g is high in salt (red)
- between 0.3g and 1.5g is medium (amber)
- 0.3g salt or less per 100g is low salt content (green)

Many food labels list 'sodium' rather than salt. To convert this to the amount of salt, multiply the amount of sodium listed by a factor of 2.5. For example, if a food label says a product has 0.6g of sodium, it contains 1.5g of salt.

Adults should eat no more than 2.4g of sodium per day, as this is equal to 6g of salt.

Children should eat less than an adult's daily recommendation of six grams, but how much differs with age so it's important to keep an eye on how much salt is already in manufactured foods:

- one to three years – no more than 2g of salt per day
- four to six years – no more than 3g of salt per day
- seven to 10 years – no more than 5g of salt per day
- 11 years and over – no more than 6g of salt per day

Babies under a year old should have less than 1g of salt a day.

If a baby is breastfed, they will get the right amount of minerals, including sodium and chloride, from breast milk. Formula milk contains a similar amount of sodium to breast milk.

More useful links

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