

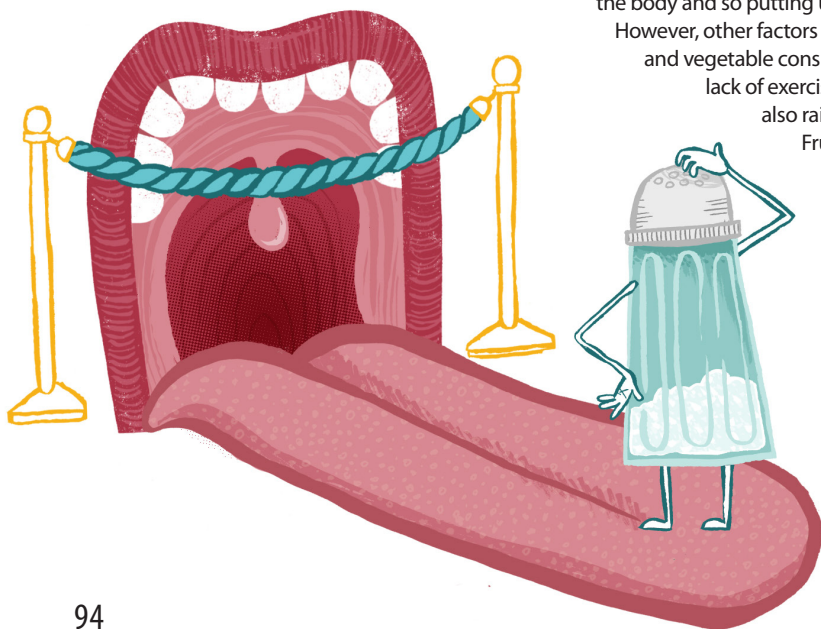
HEALTH

STOP THE SALT ■ ECZEMA – A CURE AT LAST? ■ SHUT-EYE SECRETS

SALT YOURSELF OUT

Nutritionist Hannah Brinsden tells Louise Ramsay how reducing salt intake by just a gram per day can reduce the risk of having a stroke, preventing around 2400 deaths a year in the UK

SALT AWARENESS
WEEK, 26 MARCH –
1 APRIL



WHAT IS A STROKE AND HOW DOES HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE CAUSE ONE?

'A stroke is better described as a "brain attack" and occurs when the oxygen supply to the brain is significantly reduced, resulting in a loss or reduction of brain function. The effect of stroke can be very sudden and serious,' says Hannah Brinsden, Nutritionist at Consensus Action on Salt and Health (CASH), a specialist group concerned about the health effects of salt. 'High blood pressure is the main cause of strokes and a major cause of heart attacks and heart failures; the most common causes of death and illness in the world. High blood pressure damages blood vessel walls, causing them to thicken or weaken. This results in a blockage or a bleed of a blood vessel, which leads to strokes.'

HOW DOES SALT RAISE BLOOD PRESSURE?

'There is strong evidence that links high salt intake to high blood pressure,' says Hannah. 'Sodium and chloride (which make up salt) are essential for survival, but the body only needs less than one gram per day and yet we're eating nearly nine grams a day. Your kidneys work to remove unwanted fluid from your body in a process which relies on the balance between sodium and potassium. The long-term high intake of sodium (from dietary salt) alters this balance, reducing the function of the kidneys. This results in increased water retention, which makes it harder for the heart to pump blood around the body and so putting up blood pressure.'

However, other factors such as low fruit and vegetable consumption, obesity, lack of exercise and stress can also raise blood pressure.

Fruit and vegetables are a great source of potassium, which can help counteract the negative effects of sodium.'

HOW MUCH SALT SHOULD WE EAT?

'Blood pressure is known as the 'silent killer' because over two thirds of

the population have raised or high blood pressure, but less than half of them are aware they are putting their health at risk,' explains Hannah. 'As such, the Government recommends that everyone reduces their salt intake. Current recommendations state that we should be eating less than six grams per day, about a teaspoon – and children should eat a lot less. However, the current average intake is nearly nine grams, so it's very important that everyone reduces their salt intake as much as possible.'

WHERE ARE DANGER AREAS FOR SALT CONSUMPTION?

'About three-quarters of the salt in our diet is contained in everyday foods, such as bread, cheese, soup, sauces and processed meats,' says Hannah. 'Surprisingly, most of the salt we eat (almost 20 per cent) is from bread. Meals from restaurants, fast-food outlets and cafés can also contain quite high salt levels. Some takeaways contain more than the maximum daily recommendation in one meal. The amount of salt can quickly add up.'

HOW CAN WE REDUCE SALT IN OUR DIET?

'Just because most of the salt we eat is already in the processed foods that we buy doesn't mean salt intake can't be reduced' says Hannah. 'When shopping, check labels to make sure you are choosing lower salt options – particularly for items you buy regularly such as bread, cereal and cheese. Where available, look for salt labels that are 'green' or 'amber', and avoid products that are 'red'. Although it may seem daunting, you only need to find the lower-salt options once and then you can just keep on buying that product. When cooking at home try not to add any salt – other flavours you can use include black pepper, herbs, chilli and lemon juice. And when you're out, ask for less salt to be added to dishes if possible.'

IS ROCK SALT A HEALTHIER ALTERNATIVE?

'No. It is often believed that rock salt, sea salt and other expensive gourmet salts are healthier than table salt,' says Hannah. 'However, a recent survey conducted by CASH showed that they actually contain the same amount of sodium as regular table salt. So save yourself some money and try not to add any salt to your cooking or to your plate and you will soon get used to it.'



ECZEMA BREAKTHROUGH

Eczema leaves skin itchy, dry, cracked and red – and, currently, it’s incurable. But according to exciting new research, the condition could be a thing of the past. Scientists at Stockholm University have discovered a way to kill a strain of yeast thought to set the condition off, without affecting healthy cells. Eczema, which affects 25,000 Britons, is caused by a common skin yeast called *malassezia sympodialis*. Studying the effects that 21 peptides (natural antibiotics) had on the yeast, researchers discovered that six successfully destroyed it. Lead researcher Tina Holm explains: ‘The peptides were found to be toxic to the yeast at low concentrations whilst sparing human cells. Although further research is needed, we hope that these peptides in the future can be used to ease the symptoms of patients suffering from atopic eczema – the most common form of the condition – and significantly increase their quality of life.’

SLEEP – WHO NEEDS IT?

Iron Lady Margaret Thatcher, famously, could survive on just four hours sleep a night – and now scientists may have found out why. Researchers at Ludwig Maximilians University in Munich found that people with one version of a gene called *ABCC9* slept for much shorter periods of time than those with another variant.

KEEP THE ASPIRIN FOR HEADACHES

It’s time to ditch the daily aspirin – the chances are it won’t prevent a heart attack or stroke. Researchers at University Medical Center Utrecht in The Netherlands found that only 10 per cent of women achieved more than a one-per cent risk reduction for cardiovascular disease. Two other studies found the same results in women and men.



NEW CANCER RISK

Are you a bloke who likes your steak well done? Watch out; scientists from the University of California are warning that it could raise your chance of developing the most virulent form of prostate cancer – the most common cancer in UK men. During the study, researchers found that men who ate well-done burgers had around twice the risk of developing aggressive prostate cancer in comparison to men who did not eat meat at all, or ate it rare or medium-done.



OUR HEALTH EXPERT ON... WORLD KIDNEY DAY, 8 MARCH

MEDICAL ADVISER ROBERT HANGARTNER, from CSMA Club Approved Partner CS Healthcare, on kidney care

We’re all aware high blood pressure is bad for your heart, but did you know that it can affect your kidneys too? High blood pressure is, in fact, one of the few symptoms, and causes, of kidney disease – which makes it extra important to get your blood pressure checked. Kidney disease is particularly dangerous because symptoms don’t show up until the damage is done, leaving dialysis or kidney transplant the only treatment options. When blood pressure is high, the heart has to work harder, which can damage blood vessels, including those in the kidneys. This means they may be unable to remove excess fluid from the body, further raising blood pressure. So don’t put it off – get your blood pressure tested – and keep your kidneys in tip-top condition.

To find out more, visit worldkidneyday.co.uk

The information in these pages is intended as general advice only. If you or a family member have any medical concerns, please contact your GP or medic



