

Salt and Men's Health



Salt can damage your health. Too much salt raises our blood pressure which can lead to a number of serious health conditions.

What is salt?

Salt is a substance made up of sodium and chloride. Both are essential for life but in very low quantities. Salt is now, all too often, added unnecessarily to our food by food companies as a cheap way to add flavour and bulk out meat. This has led to us eating a lot more salt than we need and getting used to the taste.

What effect does too much salt have?

Too much salt causes our body to retain water which increases our blood pressure. Raised blood pressure leads to cardiovascular disease (CVD), the biggest cause of death in the UK through the strokes and heart attacks it causes. High blood pressure is defined as over 140/90 mmHg.

Reducing salt intake by 1g per day is predicted to save 6,000 lives each year in the UK and reducing salt to the recommended level of 6g is predicted to save 14,000 - 20,000 lives.

A high salt diet has also been linked to stomach cancer, osteoporosis, kidney disease, obesity and bloating/water retention. Cardiovascular disease (CVD), kidney disease and stomach cancer are particular problems for men.

Cardiovascular Disease

CVD includes strokes, heart attacks and heart failure. A stroke occurs when the blood supply to the brain is cut off which causes a break in the brain's oxygen supply. Too much salt causes high blood pressure which is responsible for many incidences of these conditions.

Stomach Cancer

Stomach Cancer is often caused by an infection of the bacterium *Helicobacter pylori*. Salt, particularly in high concentrations, damages the delicate lining of the stomach. This makes it more vulnerable to infections of this bacterium.

Kidney Stones

Kidney Stones are made up of calcium. Salt increases the amount of calcium in the urine and therefore can increase the risk of kidney stones. Reducing salt intake has been shown to reduce the recurrence of kidney stones.

What foods contain salt?

Three quarters of the salt we eat is hidden in the prepared foods that we buy, rather than added in cooking and at the table. A lot of the foods which contain salt are surprising, for example:

- Bread
- Processed meat
- Soups
- Sandwiches
- Sauces
- Ready Meals
- Snacks

How you can reduce your salt intake

The good news is that with simple changes to your diet you can reduce your salt intake and therefore your blood pressure and other symptoms. Checking product labels and choosing low salt options as well as avoiding processed foods in favour of cooking at home are easy ways to reduce your salt intake.

Reducing your intake of high salt foods, particularly processed foods which contain a lot of hidden salt, can really help you to reduce your risk of high blood pressure. Currently the average salt intake in the UK is 8.1g per day; much higher than the daily recommended maximum limit of 6g!



Potassium

Eating more fruit and vegetables will increase your intake of potassium – this is a mineral which helps to counteract the effect that salt has on increasing water retention and blood pressure.



Top tips

- Don't add salt when cooking or at the table; it will only take a couple of weeks for you to adjust to the taste
- Have regular blood pressure checks
- Did you know that most (75%) of the salt you eat is hidden in processed foods? Check labels of products such as bread, cereal, soup, sauces and meat products and choose lower salt options