

Salt and Stomach Cancer



For many years it has been known that there is a relationship between chronic high salt intake and increased risk of stomach cancer.

What causes stomach cancer?

The bacterium *Helicobacter pylori* (*H. pylori*) is the major risk factor for stomach cancer as it can lead to inflammation of the stomach which can lead to stomach ulcers and stomach cancer.

Salt damages the stomach lining which makes it more vulnerable to the effects of *H. pylori*. Salt may even increase the growth and action of this bacterium making it more likely to cause damage.

How common is stomach cancer?

In the UK there were around 7,000 newly diagnosed cases of stomach cancer in 2015. There are more than 4,400 deaths from stomach cancer every year.

Stomach cancer has a poor prognosis with the 5 year survival rate being just 15%. Symptoms of stomach cancer may include indigestion, lack of appetite, a feeling of fullness, bleeding, blood in the stools, blood clots, pain and/or sickness.

Who is at risk of stomach cancer?

People who have the *H. pylori* infection are the most at risk of stomach cancer, although having the bacteria will not necessarily cause damage.

There are a number of other factors that can increase your risk including:

- A family history of stomach cancer
- Eating too much salt
- Smoking
- Excessive drinking
- A diet high in processed meat
- Being over 55 years of age
- Being male

People in the most deprived social groups are also at a greater risk.

If any of the above applies to you, you should take particular care to reduce your salt intake to help reduce your risk.

Preventing Stomach Cancer

The good news is that 75% of stomach cancer cases are preventable! With simple lifestyle changes such as improving diet, reducing alcohol consumption and stopping smoking, you can help lower your risk of developing stomach cancer.

Processed meats, including bacon, sausages and ham, not only contain a high level of salt they also contain nitrates and nitrites which can increase your risk of stomach cancer. Try substituting some of this processed meat for fresh meat. Fish can also be a good alternative.

Cut down on drinking & smoking. If you smoke you should try to stop, if you drink you should keep your intake down. Both of these are important risk factors for stomach and other cancers, limiting them will help to reduce your risk.

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 stomach cancer.

Currently the average salt intake in the UK is 8.1g per day; much higher than the daily recommended maximum limit of 6g!



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
- Use different flavours, including garlic, lemon, chili and fresh herbs to replace salt when cooking
- High salt foods such as cured meat, cheese, pickles and table sauces should be eaten in moderation
- 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