

# Salt and 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?

Each year stomach cancer causes about 800,000 deaths worldwide. In the UK there are about 8000 newly diagnosed cases and more than 5000 deaths from stomach cancer every year. Stomach cancer has a poor prognosis with the 5 year survival rate being just 15%.

## 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 with simple lifestyle changes such as improving diet, reducing alcohol consumption and stopping smoking, you can help lower your risk of developing stomach cancer.

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!



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.

## Top tips

- Sodium is only a part of salt. If you find sodium on a label you will need to **multiply the figure by 2.5** to get salt
- Did you know that most of the salt you eat (75%) is hidden in processed foods? **Check labels** of products such as bread, cereal, soup, sauces and meat products and choose lower salt options
- **Don't add salt** when cooking or at the table; although foods may taste bland at first it will only take a couple of weeks for you to adjust
- Try adding different flavours to your food by using pepper, herbs, spices and lemon juice