Other salts and salt substitutes

Sea salt and rock salt

It is understood that many people are switching to more expensive and premium forms of salt, such as sea salt and rock salt, because they believe that they are healthier than table salt. In fact one survey has shown that 61% of consumers believe that sea salt is lower in sodium than table salt. Garlic salt and celery salt are also popular alternatives to standard table salt. Companies and chefs often highlight the fact that sea salt has been used in a food with the implication that it makes it a tastier and more natural product.

Do not be deceived! Salt is salt. No matter how expensive salt is, whether it comes in crystals or grains, from the sea or from the Himalayas, it will more or less have the same sodium content as table and cooking salt. Apart from certain alternatives to sodium salts such as Potassium salt (see below) all salt is high in sodium, which increases your blood pressure which leads to heart disease, stroke and a number of other health conditions.

Potassium salt

Salts which contain a combination of sodium and potassium chloride are now widely available in the UK. The most widely available and used product is LoSalt.

Potassium salts have up to 66% less sodium than standard table salt, so do not carry the same high risks as sodium based salts. Potassium salts may even have a beneficial effect on your blood pressure because potassium is an antagonist of sodium.

Potassium salts can be used in the same way as standard table salt and many people feel they do replace their need for salt. However, other people have reported a metallic after taste and therefore choose not to use them. Another problem with using potassium salts is that, although you have less sodium, you still have salt tasting foods and therefore your preferences for salt will not change.

People with kidney disease or diabetes should seek medical advice before using potassium salts, as an increase in potassium intake may not be advisable.

Taste-test study

A study from Ireland demonstrated that lasagne produced with reduced salt levels and potassium salt scored higher for taste than the 'normal' salt version. The lower salt lasagne had nearly 30% less salt than the normal lasagne, without affecting the overall taste and saltiness of the finished product

Iodised Salt

CASH acknowledges that iodine deficiency is a potentially serious problem in the UK, particularly in teenage girls and in unplanned pregnancies. However, we are concerned about the public health

implication of using iodised table salt as the solution, when iodine can be obtained from many other sources.

Using table salt as a vehicle for carrying iodine is, in our view, not sensible as it requires us to put something that is potentially good into something that is known to be bad for our health. We feel that, given the high intake of salt we have in the UK and the progress that is being made, making salt beneficial to our diet is a conflict in public health. If people are aware of their need to increase iodine consumption we do not want them to think that increasing their intake of table salt is the answer.

White fish, shellfish, Oily fish, cow's milk, yogurt and eggs are a good source of iodine.

Adjusting to lower salt foods

Reducing the amount of salt in your food (without the use of salt tasting substitutes) is the preferable way that you can improve your health, although it can take awhile as foods may initially taste bland. However, within two or three weeks you will become accustomed to the taste of lower salt foods. During this time the salt taste receptors in the mouth become much more sensitive to salt and you will begin to detect salt much more easily at lower levels.

Using other sources of flavour, such as herbs, spices, black pepper, vinegar, lemon juice and chilli can improve completely the taste of food to make the transition even easier for you. Once the salt taste receptors have adjusted, you will find that high salt foods will taste unpleasant. The same applies to fatty and sugary foods.

Salt reduction in processed foods

There is a currently a huge amount of pressure on the food industry to reduce the salt content of the processed foods that they sell. A lot of research is going into finding ways that salt can be reduced in foods without affecting any of the sensory characteristics such as taste and texture. The solutions to date range from simply using potassium salt to using micro fine salt crystals which, even when a small amount is used, can give an intense salty flavour. Flavour enhancers have also been explored as a way of increasing salty taste so that the salt level can be reduced.

How you can help

Although there has been significant progress in reducing the salt content of processed foods, there is a lot more that can be done. The food industry claims that none of their customers ever tell them they want foods with less salt. Unless consumers demand it, they are less likely to make changes and the changes they do make will be done slowly. You can help by adding your voice. Why not write to your local supermarket about them the very high salt and fat content of nearly all of the processed foods that they sell. Tell them that you need processed foods that contain far less salt and fat.

For further information please contact CASH
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