



## Salt and Heart Health

Very small amounts of salt are an important part of our diet. Salt is necessary for maintaining water balance, blood pressure and for healthy muscles and nerves.

Research however, shows that we are eating much higher levels of salt than the body needs and this is a problem for health. Eating a diet high in salt can increase blood pressure levels, which in turn increases the risk of developing heart disease or stroke.

### Recommended intake of salt:

It is recommended that we eat less than 6 grams (1 teaspoon) of salt per day. Children should eat much smaller amounts, depending on age. Around 80% of the salt we eat is hidden in processed foods, fast food, canteen and restaurant food, so we have little control over the amount of salt we eat. Only 5% occurs naturally in food and about 10-15% is added in cooking or at the table. Reducing our intake of processed foods will help to reduce our salt intake.

### Understanding food labels:

Most of the salt in our diet is sodium chloride. Most foods are labelled with the amount of sodium, rather than salt, in grams per 100 grams of product, which is confusing. To convert sodium to salt multiply by 2.5.

### For example:

1 gram of sodium per 100g = 2.5 grams salt per 100g

To convert salt to sodium divide by 2.5

1 gram salt per 100g = 0.4 g sodium per 100g

Many ingredients also contain sodium. Here are a few sodium watchwords

- Baking soda [sodium bicarbonate]
- Baking powder
- Brine [salt and water]
- Monosodium glutamate [msg,flavour enhancer]
- Sodium caseinate [thickener]
- Sodium nitrate [preservative]
- Soy sauce
- Teriyaki sauce .

### So what can you eat?

- Fresh meat, fish, eggs, beans and lentils.
- Fresh fruit and vegetables including frozen, and those tinned without salt but in natural juices.
- Cereals including rice, pasta,potatoes,bread,breakfast cereals, and unsalted crackers.
- Milk, cheese, yogurt, soft cheese and small amounts of hard cheese.
- Fresh herbs, spices,pepper,vinegar,mustard and tomato puree.



### **What should we try to avoid?**

- Salty meats such as ham, sausages, bacon and pate
- Tinned, packet or instant soups and sauces
- Soy sauce, stock cubes and gravy powder
- Tinned food including salt
- Smoked meat and fish
- Meat and yeast extracts
- Any more than 4 oz hard cheese/week
- Salted snacks like crisps, salted nuts etc.
- High salt take away meals

*Try to limit your intake to 1 serving from above list/day*

### **Simple ways of cutting down on salt:**

- Gradually reduce the amount of salt you add at the table and during cooking, aiming over time to cut out added salt completely. Learn to enjoy the natural flavours of food again
- Use alternative flavourings such as black pepper, herbs, spices or lemon juice.
- Limit use of stock cubes, gravy granules, packet soups and ready-made sauces which are all high in salt
- Choose fresh fruit, vegetables and lean meat more often than processed versions

### **Key heart healthy eating recommendations:**

- Choose at least four or more portions of fruit and vegetables every day
- Eat less fat, especially saturated fat
- Eat oily fish (e.g. salmon, mackerel, trout) at least once a week
- Maintain a healthy body weight
- Drink alcohol in moderation
- Exercise regularly

For more information on Healthy Eating Guidelines log on to [www.indi.ie](http://www.indi.ie)  
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