

Nutrition Guide

Sodium – Tackling a Salty Subject

Sodium is a mineral that is required in small amounts to keep the body working properly. Sodium is essential for maintaining proper fluid balance and enabling the transmission of nerve impulses and muscle contractions. But consuming too much sodium can have an adverse impact on health.

The kidneys are the main regulators of sodium levels in the body. When there is an excessive intake of sodium, the kidneys will eliminate the extra in urine.

However, if for some reason the kidneys can't get rid of enough sodium, the sodium starts to accumulate in the blood. As sodium attracts water, it will draw water into the bloodstream, causing the volume of blood to expand. This forces the heart to work harder to move more blood throughout the body, which increases the pressure in blood vessels. Over time, this can lead to high blood pressure (also known as hypertension). Hypertension is a major risk factor for stroke, heart disease and kidney disease.

Studies have shown that consuming less sodium helps lower blood pressure, and this positive effect was found to be greater among people with hypertension. Other medical conditions which could benefit from a reduced sodium intake include chronic kidney disease and congestive heart failure.

Where is the sodium in food?

Sodium is found naturally in all the food we eat. Fresh foods tend to have a lower sodium content compared to processed foods, as manufacturers frequently add sodium into food products for taste or as a preservative.

Salt, sauces and other seasonings (e.g. soy sauce, ketchup and stock cubes) used in cooking or at the table are also key contributors of sodium in the diet.



The words “salt” and “sodium” are often used interchangeably, but they do not mean the same thing. Sodium is one of the chemical elements found in salt. Salt, also known as sodium chloride, contains 40% sodium.

The information provided in this fact sheet is intended to be used as a guide only. If you have specific dietary requirements due to certain medical conditions, consult a dietitian for personalised advice.



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Tips for cutting back on sodium

- **Go fresh**

Choose fresh vegetables and fruits over preserved or pickled varieties. Go for fresh fish, chicken and lean meat instead of canned, cured or processed meats (e.g. luncheon meat, salted fish, smoked salmon, ham and sausage).

- **Be a smart shopper**

Look out for food products which are marked “reduced salt”, “less sodium” or “no added salt”. Read food labels and compare the sodium content between different brands – products which contain a lot of sodium may not always taste salty. Do note that food products with lower sodium content should still be consumed or used in moderation.

- **Spice up your meals**

Try using natural seasonings to add flavour to your food without increasing its sodium content. Examples include herbs like parsley, coriander, onion, garlic and chives; as well as spices like cinnamon, cardamom, cumin and pepper. You can also add some zest to your food with lemon or lime juice.

- **Dining out wisely**

When eating out, ask for little or no gravy on your food. Avoid drinking all the soup in soup noodles. Ask for your meal to be prepared with less salt, and request that sauces be served “on the side”. Also, make it a point to taste your food before you add salt and/or sauces. If you must, do so sparingly.

Start slow and persevere. You will gradually get used to a lower sodium intake and acquire a taste for less salty foods.

How about salt substitutes? While they can lower the sodium content of the diet, these products do not help recondition the taste buds as they reinforce the liking for salty foods. Many of them also contain potassium, and may not be suitable for people with kidney problems or taking certain medications. Check with your doctor before using salt substitutes.

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