Salt & Blood Pressure

What is Salt?

Salt is the common name for sodium chloride. Salt is identified on food labels as sodium.

Why Reduce Your Intake of Sodium?

There is strong evidence that a reduction in sodium can assist to lower high blood pressure. If you have been diagnosed with high blood pressure (hypertension) you are at a higher risk of cardiovascular disease including stroke, heart disease and kidney disease. Lowering your sodium intake can help you reduce your risk by reducing your blood pressure.

The Dietary Guidelines for all Australians suggests that we should:

- Choose Low-Salt Foods and Use Salt Sparingly

This means reducing sodium intake is encouraged for everyone, not only people with blood pressure.

Where is Sodium Found?

A large quantity of the sodium we consume is provided through packaged and processed foods.

Fresh vegetables and fruit; fresh meat, poultry, fish and eggs; low fat milk and yoghurt; unsalted nuts and seeds; and cereals and grains such as rice, oats, wheat etc. contain little naturally occurring sodium.

However, when foods:

- are processed (e.g. some breakfast cereals and bread)
- are preserved (i.e. tuna in brine, smoked goods and ham)
- are cooked in salty solutions (e.g. some sauces or stocks)
- have flavours added (e.g. some savoury biscuits and pasta sauces)
- have salt added (e.g. at the table)

the sodium content is increased by the addition of salt.

How Much Sodium?

Our body only requires a small amount of sodium every day. Sodium deficiency is uncommon in healthy individuals.

In fact, sodium intake in Australia is estimated at 3200mg per person per day, almost double the Heart Foundations recommendation of 1550mg (or less) per person per day for people at higher risk of cardiovascular disease.
How Can I Reduce My Sodium Intake

Allow Your Tastebuds Time to Adapt
Your tastebuds may take up to 4-6 weeks to adapt to a lower sodium intake and begin to appreciate the natural flavours of food. Reduce quantities of salt gradually.

Learn to Read Nutrition Labels
Check the Nutrition Information Panel for sodium on packaged foods.
- Look for “low salt” products that contain 120mg of sodium or less per 100g
- Look for “reduced salt or no added salt” products containing 400mg of sodium or less per 100g
- Look for the Heart Foundation Tick to help identify lower sodium alternatives

Put the Salt Shaker Away
Reduce or stop adding extra salt to meals and snacks during preparation or at the table. This includes all forms of salt – i.e. rock salt, sea salt, salt flakes, pink salt, garlic salt, onion salt etc.

Healthy alternatives to salt are fresh or dried herbs and spices. Examples include:
- Ginger
- Basil
- Mint
- Pepper
- Coriander
- Allspice
- Garlic
- Oregano
- Sage
- Paprika
- Chives
- Cinnamon
- Chilli
- Parsley
- Rosemary
- Cumin
- Fennel
- Nutmeg
- Lemongrass
- Thyme
- Bay Leaf
- Turmeric
- Dill
- Curry Powder

Additionally, lemon juice, lime juice and vinegar are also healthy options to enhance flavour. Note: Salt substitutes such as lite salt are not recommended.

Common High Sodium Foods

Look for lower sodium alternatives using your label reading skills for the following foods:
- Tomato Paste
- Soups
- Canned / Jar Vegetables
- Stock Liquid / Cubes
- Pre Prepared Meals
- Baked Beans
- Gravy / Sauces
- Bread
- Canned Fish / Chicken
- Margarine
- Breakfast Cereals
- Seasoning Mixes / Sachets

Limit your intake of the following higher sodium foods:
- Savoury Biscuits
- Sausage / Salami
- Take Away
- Crisps / Chips
- Smoked Meat / Fish
- Salted Nuts
- Pies / Pastry Goods
- Ham / Bacon
- Olives / Capers
- Pizza
- Cheese
- Dips
Additional Information for Managing High Blood Pressure

In addition to reducing your sodium intake, changes to other lifestyle factors can help manage high blood pressure. It is advised to:

- avoid cigarette smoke
- maintain a healthy body weight and waist circumference
- limit your alcohol intake
- participate in regular physical activity
- eat a healthy diet including fruit and vegetables daily
- take medications as prescribed by your treating doctor

Studies have shown that by making positive lifestyle changes, many people with high blood pressure on advice from their doctor, may be able to reduce their blood pressure medications.

Smoking

If you currently smoke, it is advisable to quit. Quitting smoking is encouraged to reduce your overall risk of cardiovascular disease. For information and assistance on quitting smoking, talk to your doctor and contact the Quitline (13 QUIT).

Weight Management

All adults, especially those with diabetes and high blood pressure are encouraged to maintain a healthy weight and waist measurement.

If you need to lose weight, begin by setting some achievable goals for:

- increasing physical activity
- reducing energy intake (kilojoules) from food

Physical Activity

Walking a minimum of 10,000 steps is recommended for health. A pedometer is a useful tool to monitor your steps. Another measure of physical activity is to aim for a minimum of 30mins of physical activity each day and reduce time spent in sedentary activities (i.e. watching TV, time spent sitting in front of on computer etc). Strength training is also beneficial for health.

Limit Alcohol

Excessive consumption of alcohol has been shown to increase blood pressure.

1 Standard Drink =

- 100ml Wine
- 30ml Spirits
- 285ml Beer

Consumption of alcohol should be restricted to no more than 2 standard drinks per day for all adults.

Additionally you may consider alcohol free days each week.

Potassium Intake

Dietary intake of potassium has been shown to help manage blood pressure. Rich sources of potassium are fruits and vegetables. To optimise your potassium intake aim to include:

- 2 serves of fruit
- 5+ serves of vegetables each day, especially leafy green and coloured varieties
  Limit serves of starchy vegetables (potato, sweet potato and corn) to 1 or 2 serves per day

(Please note: if you have renal impairment, please discuss any increase of potassium rich foods with your doctor).