

## BEWARE OF HIDDEN SALT IN FOOD

The information explosion in the science of nutrition very often creates the impression that available information is contradictory. Consequently, it is no longer easy to distinguish between fact, misinformation and fiction. The Division of Human Nutrition, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Stellenbosch University act as a reliable and independent source of nutrition information.

**75% of the salt that we eat is hidden in the food that we buy. Eat less processed and ready prepared food.**

Evidence has shown that regularly eating too much salt puts us at increased risk of developing high blood pressure. High blood pressure is the main cause of strokes and a major cause of heart attacks and heart failures, the most common causes of death and illness in the world. 31.8% of South Africans have high blood pressure. Food regulation is not enough to reduce South Africans' salt intake. Educating the public is crucial to the success of salt reduction.

This year's theme for World Salt Awareness Week is **"Look out for Hidden Salt"**. Many people unfortunately don't realise they are eating too much salt. The World Health Organisation recommends that adults eat less than 5g of salt (a teaspoon) a day. However, a reduction of salt intake by just two grams a day will reduce your risk of cardiovascular events by 20%.

Thanks to efforts by the food industry, governments and health organisations like WASH, salt is well and truly on the health agenda across many countries worldwide.

### **Table salt, or Sodium Chloride (NaCl)**

The main source of sodium is table salt, or sodium chloride (NaCl). Salt helps to regulate the body's fluid balance, but the amount we eat is far more than we require. One teaspoon (5g) of salt contains approximately 2 000 mg of sodium. Multiply the amount of sodium in milligrams by 2,5 to calculate the amount of salt in milligrams (divide by 1000 to get the salt value in grams).

*People can make a key dietary change to help lower their risk: Eat more fresh vegetables and fruits, which are naturally high in potassium and low in sodium and eat less bread, cheese,*

*and processed meat, as these and other processed foods are high in sodium and low in potassium.*

## **Guidelines for a Low Salt Diet**

Foods don't necessarily have to taste salty to be salty. It can be tricky to reduce salt intake, as it is often already in the foods we buy, and we can't take it out. Most of the salt in our diet, up to 60%, is found in processed foods. Bread is a serious concern as it is very high in salt and consumed as a staple food in South Africa. Other culprits are margarine, butter spreads, stock cubes, soup powders, breakfast cereals and savoury snacks. The remaining 40% is added at the table.

Fast food and restaurant meals also contain lots of hidden salt, especially if it is made of processed meat and cheese. An average pizza contains about 6.2g of salt.

Read food labels and the ingredients list. If sodium or salt is listed in the first three ingredients, the food is likely to be a high-salt choice. Use this as a rule when choosing foods containing salt: those that contain more than 1,5g per 100g are high in salt. Try to avoid these. Foods that have less than 0,3g of salt per 100g are low in salt and a better choice for you. Look for the Heart Mark to identify foods that are lower in salt content. Some products appear to have less salt than they do: 'low sodium' 120 mg sodium for each 100 g, whereas 'virtually free from sodium' actually means there can be up to 5mg sodium for each 100g.

Do not add extra salt to food at the table. Rather use alternative flavourings that do not contain salt, e.g. herbs, pepper, curry, vinegar, onions, peppers, garlic, ginger, rosemary and lemon juice. Avoid salt-containing flavouring agents such as onion salt, celery salt, garlic salt, vegetable salt, barbeque and chicken spices, meat tenderisers, commercial sauces, soups, gravies, and stock cubes. Check the food labels for ingredients e.g. salt, sodium, monosodium glutamate (MSG), sodium nitrate, sodium bicarbonate and soy sauce or any sodium-containing additive.

Don't be fooled into thinking that fancier types of salt are better for you. Whether it's pink, black, rock, crystal or flakes, they still have the same effect on your blood pressure as standard table salt. Although less refined salts might contain more nutrients than everyday table salt, these will probably only be in very small amounts and can probably be sourced from other foods in your diet. Bigger crystals also taste less salty, so you are likely to add more than refined salt.

**Try these alternatives for great flavour:**

**Allspice:** Lean ground meats, stews, tomatoes, peaches, applesauce, cranberry sauce, gravies, lean meat

**Almond extract:** Puddings, fruits

**Basil:** Fish, lamb, lean ground meats, stews, salads, soups, sauces, fish cocktails

**Bay leaves:** Lean meats, stews, poultry, soups, tomatoes

**Chives:** Salads, sauces, soups, lean meat dishes, vegetables

**Cider vinegar and lemon juice:** Salads, vegetables, sauces

**Cinnamon:** Fruits (especially apples), breads, pie crusts

**Curry powder:** Lean meats (especially lamb), veal, chicken, fish, tomatoes, tomato soup, mayonnaise

**Dill:** Fish sauces, soups, tomatoes, cabbages, carrots, cauliflower, green beans, cucumbers, potatoes, salads, macaroni, lean beef, lamb, chicken, fish

**Garlic:** Lean meats, fish, soups, salads, vegetables, tomatoes, potatoes (not garlic salt)

**Ginger:** Chicken

**Lemon juice:** Lean meats, fish, poultry, salads, vegetables

**Nutmeg:** Fruits, piecrust, lemonade, potatoes, chicken, fish, lean meat loaf, toast, veal, pudding

**Onion:** Lean meats, stews, vegetables, salads, soups (not onion salt)

**Paprika:** Lean meats, fish, soups, salads, sauces, vegetables

**Parsley:** Lean meats, fish, soups, salads, sauces, vegetables

**Rosemary:** Chicken, veal, lean meat loaf, lean beef, lean pork, sauces, potatoes, peas, lima beans

**Sage:** Lean meats, stews, biscuits, tomatoes, green beans, fish, lima beans, onions, lean pork

**Thyme:** Lean meats (especially veal and lean pork), sauces, soups, onions, peas, tomatoes, salads

Source: [www.healthylivingforlife.org](http://www.healthylivingforlife.org)

**Hints to lower salt intake**

<b>Foods with a high salt content</b>	<i>Rather use</i>
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Processed foods like viennas, cold meats, ham, hamburger patties or bully beef, beef and pork sausages, boerewors	<i>Unprocessed chicken, meat or fish, meatballs or other mince dishes, ostrich or venison</i>
Cured meat: Biltong, bokoms, anchovies, corned beef, pickled tongue	
Canned fish, dried fish and smoked fish	<i>Fresh or frozen fish products</i>
Processed pasta, instant noodles	<i>Pasta and rice prepared with little salt</i>
Salty spreads like meat and vegetable extracts, fish paste, liver or meat spreads, pâté, cheese spread	<i>Different types of jams and cottage cheese</i>
Cheeses with a high salt content like Blaauwkrantz, Roquefort, Parmesan and Feta cheese	<i>Cheddar, Gouda, Brie, Mozzarella, or Ricotta in small amounts</i>
Worcestershire and soya sauce	<i>Lemon juice, vinegar, herbs or lite soya</i>
Salty snacks like chips, salty biscuits, biltong, dried sausage, salted nuts, salted popcorn, olives or pickles	<i>Provitas or cream crackers, unsalted nuts, seeds and popcorn</i>
Fast Food pizzas, burger, crumbed chicken, sauces,	<i>Home cooked meals</i>

**Acknowledgement:**

RenalSmart Nutritional Information System. Low Potassium Diet; Low Sodium Diet.

Available at:

[http://sun025.sun.ac.za/portal/page/portal/Health\\_Sciences/English/Centres%20and%20Institutions/Nicus/SA\\_Renal\\_Exchange\\_list](http://sun025.sun.ac.za/portal/page/portal/Health_Sciences/English/Centres%20and%20Institutions/Nicus/SA_Renal_Exchange_list)

The heart and Stroke Foundation of South Africa. Available at:

<http://www.heartfoundation.co.za/>

***For further, personalized and more detailed information, please contact a dietitian registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa.***

*References from the scientific literature used to compile this document are available on request.*

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