

## SALT – HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

A high dietary sodium intake is associated with the development of high blood pressure which is linked to an increased risk of death from heart disease or stroke. Studies have shown that a decrease in salt intake leads to a reduction in blood pressure. In the UK, most people are eating too much salt. The average intake is 9.5g salt daily, and the Government has set a **maximum daily target of 6g salt daily** (for adults, less for children) to improve health. A reduction in salt intake to this level would predict a 13% reduction in stroke and a 10% reduction in ischemic heart disease.

Most of the sodium in our diets is present as salt. To convert sodium levels to salt multiply the sodium content by 2.5 (1g sodium = 2.5g salt). Sodium levels are low in unprocessed foods. In the UK three quarters of the sodium in our diet comes from manufactured foods, where it is used as a preservative (sodium nitrate), antioxidant (sodium ascorbate) and a flavouring agent (monosodium glutamate) as well as salt. The salt added when cooking or at the table contributes to a further 10-15% and salt that is found naturally in most foods represents the remaining 10-15%.

**Salt content of some foods** (based on average portions)

<b>Food Product</b>	<b>Salt (grams)</b>
1 stock cube	1
Bacon (1 rasher of back bacon)	1.25
Hard Cheese (1 small matchbox)	0.5
Cornflakes (dessert bowl full)	1
Sweet and sour chicken ready meal (per portion)	2.5
Tagliatelle Carbonara ready meal (per portion)	2
1 burger	1.5
1 medium sausage	1
1 packet of crisps	0.75
1 dessertspoon soy sauce	2
Minestrone packet soup	3.75
Tomato/brown sauce and salad cream (2 sachets)	0.5

**NB:** Four and a half soluble analgesic tablets (eg soluble paracetamol) contains the equivalent of 5g salt – almost the total recommended daily intake.

### **Tips for reducing sodium intake:**

- ✓ Check food labels to select ‘lower salt’ or ‘reduced salt’ foods
- ✓ Cut back on other forms of sodium such as monosodium glutamate and soy sauce
- ✓ Choose canned vegetables and pulses marked ‘no added salt’ and products canned in water rather than brine (eg canned tuna)
- ✓ Try not to add salt when preparing foods at home or at the table (cutting down gradually can help taste buds to adjust to a less salty taste)
- ✓ Stock cubes are high in sodium, so choose lower salt versions, make your own stock, or try adding herbs, spices, lemon juice or mustard for flavour instead)

Further information: A DASH diet plan including low-salt foods and other healthy lifestyle messages has been developed by the Doctor Patient Partnership with the Dairy Council. Copies are available free from the publications section of the Dairy Council (website <http://milk.co.uk/catalog>)

*With thanks from Hilary Peake, Dietitian, Exeter PCT*