

The benefits of eating less:

- We learn to crave salt, but we can learn to prefer less in just a few months.
- You may start to notice a wider range of flavours in food, as your taste buds adjust to having less salt.
- If cut back on heavily salted items, you could end up eating a more nutritious diet because sodium often lurks in foods that are high in calories, fat and sugar.
- Cutting down on salt reduces BP, whether or not your BP is high to start with.
- When your BP goes down, your risk of developing heart disease and stroke goes down too, whatever your age.
- If you have high BP, reducing salt can help to lower your blood pressure in weeks.

How to reduce salt in your diet:

- Potassium can lessen the adverse effect of sodium on blood pressure (Sources include: sweet potatoes, squash, spinach, bananas, melons, pulses and plantains).
- Avoid red traffic light salt rated foods. **Red (High)**, **Amber (Medium)**, or **Green (Low)**.
- Foods like breads and cereals may not taste salty, but can be packed with sodium.
- Labels promising “reduced sodium” or “unsalted” may contain more than you need.
- Salt can be listed by other names, such as baking soda, baking powder, disodium phosphate, or any compound with sodium or Na in its name, so check food labels.
- If you take any prescriptive medications check if they contain any sodium.
- Instead of seasoning with salt, try pepper, herbs, spices, lemon, vinegars, garlic, onion and salt-free seasoning blends.
- If you must have salt, add it after cooking since the stronger taste will help you use less.

The Bottom Line:

As you can see sodium (found in salt) is crucial for our health and wellbeing, and for the prevention of illnesses – when kept in low amounts. However, it is too easy to consume more than you need, due to the increasing amounts put into our daily staples like bread, and in processed foods. There should be enough sodium naturally present in the fresh foods we eat to sustain health without the need to season. Remember it is easy to wean yourself off high salt consumption when done gradually. ***So, go on ...pass (on) the salt!***



FOOD*in***FOCUS**

SODIUM

Welcome to Vacherin's food in focus.

Each month our nutritionist Gary Baverstock will provide some basic science and will help to demystify certain foods in our diet.

Sodium & Salt

- It has been theorised that dietary salt consumption was extremely low in the Palaeolithic diet – approximately less than 2g of salt daily.
- Inland hunter-gatherers added little or no salt to their food on a regular basis.
- Salt was the most taxed and traded commodity in the world, with intake reaching – on average – a peak around the 1870s at around 6g/d worldwide.
- Freezing and refrigeration meant salt was no longer required as a preservative and salt intake declined.
- Due to the recent large increase in consumption of highly salted processed foods, salt intake has overtaken the 1870s, and is approximately 9-12 g/day (almost 6 times more than our Palaeolithic salt intake).
- “Salt” and “sodium” are used synonymously. In fact, salt is only 40% sodium; 1 g of salt has 400 mg sodium. Sodium x 2.5 = Salt quantity. Sodium + Chloride (NaCl) = Salt.
- 75% of a person's salt intake is often derived from processed food; only about 20% is naturally occurring or from salt added in cooking or at the table (the rest comes from sources such as water treatment and medications).

Use in the body – Health Benefits

- Sodium is one of the primary electrolytes in the body.
- All four electrolytes (sodium, potassium, magnesium, and calcium) are available in unrefined salt, as are other vital minerals needed for optimal bodily function.
- Sodium works with chloride and potassium to maintain fluid balance in the body.
- It also helps regulate blood pressure, transmits nerve impulses, and helps muscles, including the heart, contract and relax.
- Too much or too little salt in the diet can lead to muscle cramps, dizziness, cramps or even an electrolyte disturbance, which can cause severe, even fatal, neurological problems.

Mechanism Of Action

- Your body removes unwanted fluid by filtering your blood through your kidneys.
- Here any extra fluid is sucked out and put into your bladder to be removed as urine.
- To do this, your kidneys use osmosis to draw the extra water out of your blood.
- This process uses a delicate balance of sodium and potassium to pull the water across a wall of cells from the bloodstream into a collecting channel that leads to the bladder – sodium is critical for water retention.

How Salt Is Related To Blood Pressure

- Eating salt raises the amount of sodium in your bloodstream and wrecks this delicate balance, reducing the ability of your kidneys to remove the water.
- So because salt makes your body retain water, it keeps the amount of fluid circulating in the body higher than it should be, which means increased pressure on the blood vessel walls and extra strain on the delicate blood vessels leading to the kidneys.

- The walls thicken and narrow in response to continued high pressure, and the heart must pump harder to move fluid around.
- This increased work makes the heart muscle larger and increases the force of each contraction
- The higher pressure damages blood vessels and the filtration system in the kidneys.
- Over time, this extra strain can damage the kidneys - known as kidney disease.
- This reduces their ability to filter out unwanted and toxic waste products, which then start to build up in the body.
- Eating excessive salt also makes a person thirsty, which means they tend to drink more, and this makes the situation worse.

(Health Risks) Illnesses Related to High Salt Intake

- Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is the leading cause of death and disability worldwide.
- Raised cholesterol, smoking and high blood pressure (BP) are the major risk factors – high BP accounting for 62% of strokes and 49% of coronary heart disease.
- Our current consumption of salt is the major factor increasing BP and thereby CVD.
- High sodium increases the risk of stroke, left ventricular hypertrophy, renal disease, duodenal or gastric ulcers and affect brain function, even in the absence of high BP.
- Other diseases such as congestive heart failure, cirrhosis and chronic kidney disease that can make it hard for your kidneys to keep sodium levels balanced.

Recommended Daily Amounts (Reference Nutrient Intake)

- In the United Kingdom the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) recommended in 2003 that, for a typical adult, the Reference Nutrient Intake should be set at a maximum of 6g salt per day (2.4g sodium).
- It is believed that we can survive on as little as 1.25g Salt (0.5g sodium) daily.

High salt is found in:

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| ● Cured meats | ● Quiches or soufflés | ● Gravies and sauces (BBQ, soy, Worcester shire, smoke-flavour) |
| ● Sausages or substitutes | ● Ready meals (fresh/frozen) | ● Seasoning salts (garlic, onion, celery) |
| ● Frankfurters, hot dogs | ● Canned or dehydrated soups | ● Olives, pickles, pickle relish |
| ● Fish (frozen, pre-breaded, pre-fried, smoked) | ● Canned vegetables and vegetable juices | ● Mayonnaise & salad dressings |
| ● Fish, canned in oil or brine | ● Cheeses | ● Meat tenderizer, monosodium glutamate (MSG) |
| ● Canned shellfish | ● Breads | |
| ● Salted nuts or seeds | ● Salted crackers, crisps etc | |
| ● Canned beans or peas | ● Soups | |
| ● Soy protein products | ● Commercially baked goods (cakes, cookies, pies, pastries) | |
| ● Pizzas | ● Ketchup, chilli sauce | |
| ● Pastas such as lasagne, macaroni cheese | | |