

Background information for course leader

Salt is sodium chloride which is a mineral. It is needed in the body in very small amounts to regulate the water content of the body and to help the nervous system work. The nervous system sends messages through the body, making the body move and work.

Salt in our diet comes from:

- hidden salts in food
- the salt we add during cooking
- the salt we add at the table.

Eating too much salt increases our chances of having high blood pressure. This can lead to heart disease and strokes. This is because salt affects the function of the kidneys, decreasing the amount of water we get rid of as urine. The increased amount of water stays in the blood stream, making the heart work harder.

Average blood pressure = 120/80 mmHg (millimetres of mercury)

Should be below = 140/85 mmHg

Sources of salt:

- processed meats
- processed foods, such as soup and ready meals
- sauces, such as ketchup, gravy, pasta sauce and soya sauce
- cheese
- salty snacks such as crisps, salted nuts
- pies
- bread, cereals and biscuits can be high in salt.

Reference intakes (RIs)

Needed by average adults of normal weight and average activity levels

Each day	Women	Men
Salt (g)	Less than 6g	Less than 6g

6g is about 1 teaspoon.

How to reduce salt intake:

- Eat less processed, canned, tinned food.
- Reduce the amount used in cooking.
- Use dried herbs and pepper to flavour foods rather than salt.
- Do not add salt at the table.
- Compare brands of food, some have a lot less salt.
- Look for labels that say 'reduced salt'.