Patient Information

Renal Patients: How to Reduce your Salt Intake

Why restrict my salt intake?

The average daily intake of salt by adults in the UK is above the recommended maximum level of 6g per day. Too much salt can contribute to high blood pressure, which is a risk factor for coronary heart disease. In patients with kidney disease, too much salt can be particularly problematic as it can encourage the body to hold excessive amounts of water (oedema), as well as increasing thirst which can make it difficult for those on fluid restriction.

How much salt can I have?

Health experts recommend that adults should consume less than 6g of salt a day. 6g of salt equates to roughly one level teaspoon. This includes all varieties such as sea salt, garlic salt and celery salt.

IMPORTANT: Do not use salt substitutes, e.g. Lo-Salt as they contain potassium.

Reducing your salt intake

Reducing the amount of salt in your diet may be quite a big change for you, but you will be surprised how quickly your taste buds adapt to a reduction of salt in your diet and become more sensitive to the natural flavours in food. Some top tips to help you are:

■ Cut down gradually and you should not notice the difference.
■ Cut down on salty processed meals and try to cook from fresh if you can.
■ Use little or no salt in your cooking (e.g. when boiling vegetables).
■ Avoid adding salt to your meal at the table - leave the salt shaker off the table.
■ Watch out for cooking sauces (especially soy sauce) and ready mixed ‘seasonings’ as some of these are very high in salt.
■ Replace salt with herbs and spices, lemon or vinegar.
■ Use food labels to choose lower salt options (see later).
■ Watch out for salt in snacks such as crisps, nuts and highly salted foods such as bacon, cheese and other processed foods such as ready meals and takeaways.
■ Switch salty snacks for a variety of fruit and vegetables (within allowance - if on a low potassium diet).
Foods to limit
A staggering 75% of a person’s dietary salt is already added or ‘hidden’ in the food we buy. The main foods containing high amounts of salt are:

- Salty meats and meat products such as ham, bacon, sausages, paté, salami.
- Canned, packet and instant soups.
- Ketchup, soy sauce, mayonnaise, pickles.
- Stock cubes, gravy powder and salted flavourings.
- Any canned food containing salt.
- Smoked meat and fish, prawns and anchovies.
- Meat and yeast extracts.
- Cheese.
- Salted snacks like crisps, salted nuts, salted biscuits, salted popcorn.
- High salt ready meals, sauces and takeaway meals like pizza, Chinese and Indian.
- Pasta sauce.

Bread and breakfast cereals are an important part of a healthy diet, however, bread and some breakfast cereals can contain a considerable amount of salt - compare labels when you are shopping and choose the ones that contain lower amounts.

If you have high blood pressure, being active, keeping a healthy weight, not drinking too much alcohol and regular check ups are also important in maintaining optimal health.

Food labelling
Choose lower salt options using the following guidelines by looking at food labels:

- **High** is more than 1.5g salt per 100g (or 0.6g sodium)
- **Medium** is between 0.3g (or 0.1g sodium) and 1.5g salt (0.6g sodium) per 100g
- **Low** is 0.3g salt or less per 100g (or 0.01g sodium)

Salt is sodium chloride and as food labels often list both salt and sodium content, it can be confusing.

- To convert salt to sodium, divide by 2.5
- To convert sodium to salt, multiply by 2.5

For example:

- 1g salt = 0.4g sodium
- 0.8g sodium = 2g salt

**For ready meals and sandwiches**, try to choose meals with under 0.5g sodium per meal, i.e. 1.25g salt.

**For individual meals** - soups, sauces - try to choose foods with under 0.3g sodium per serving, i.e. 0.75g salt.

Written information cannot replace personalised recommendations. For further advice please seek a dietetic referral from your consultant or GP.