Salt and hypertension

Tool **H9**

Why is too much salt a problem?

There is a strong link between a high salt intake and elevated blood pressure.[1] Hypertension can contribute to cardiovascular disease – including coronary heart disease, heart failure and stroke – and kidney disease.

Recommended maximum intakes of salt

Babies and children

Babies and children require a much smaller amount of salt than adults (see chart on the right). For babies, appropriate amounts can easily be supplied through breast milk. The 'target' levels shown on the right represent an achievable *maximum* for health – not what is *optimal*.

Daily target average salt intakes for infants and children†

Age	Target average salt intake (grams per day)
0-6 months	Less than 1g
7-12 months	1g
1-3 years	2g
4-6 years	3g
7-10 years	5g
11-14 years	6g

Source: Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition, 2003 [1]

Older children and adults

It is recommended that older children and adults should not exceed the *maximum* daily intake level of 6g of salt per day. Again, this reflects what is *achievable* – not what is recommended (which is 4g per day for adults).[2]

Salt and sodium in food

People often use the terms 'salt' and 'sodium' interchangeably. However, salt is a compound of sodium and chloride. Too much sodium can cause ill health. Salt is by far the biggest source of sodium in the diet.

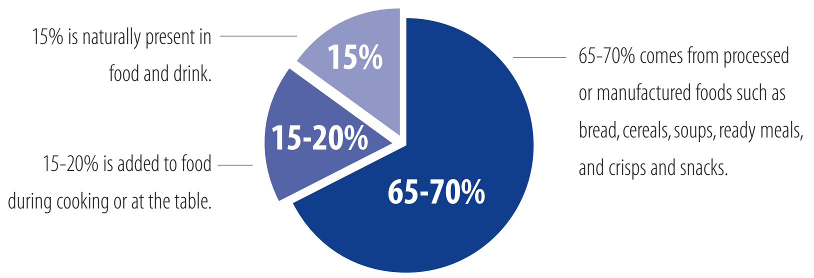
Some food labels give the sodium level but not the salt levels. Levels of salt can be roughly calculated by multiplying the sodium (per 100g) by 2.5. The Food Standards Agency provides an online calculator (at www.salt.gov.uk) to work out levels of salt in food.[3]

Guide to salt levels in food

A lot	A little
1.25g salt (or 0.5g sodium) or more per 100g	0.25g salt (or 0.1g sodium) or less per 100g

Source: Food Standards Agency, 2005 [3]

Main sources of salt in the diet



Source: Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition, 2003;[1] and Food Standards Agency website[3]

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Resources

Percentage contribution of food types to average daily intake of sodium, by age and sex *			
Food	**Men**	**Women**	**All**
	(%)	**(%)**	**(%)**
Cereals and cereal products	35	36	35
Milk and milk products	7	9	8
Eggs and egg dishes	2	2	2
Fat spreads	3	3	3
Meat and meat products	28	23	26
Fish and fish dishes	3	5	4
Vegetables (excluding potatoes)	6	7	7
Potatoes and savoury snacks	3	4	4
Fruit and nuts	0	1	0
Sugars, preserves and confectionery	1	1	1
Drinks**	2	2	2
Miscellaneous***	8	10	9
TOTAL	98	103	101

Source: Adapted from the National Diet and Nutrition Survey, 2003 [4]

* Data are for intakes from food only and do not include further additions of salt in cooking or at the table.

** Includes soft drinks, alcohol drinks, tea, coffee and water.

*** Includes powdered beverages (except tea and coffee), soups, sauces, condiments and artificial sweeteners.

Tips for salt reduction

Comprehensive guidance on reducing salt intake is available from the Food Standards Agency and CASH (details below). Key tips include:

- Avoid adding salt to cooking or to food at the table.
- Eat more fruit and vegetables – they're lower in salt and saturated fats than processed foods.
- Choose products with less salt/sodium. Go for the 'low salt' option and look at the information on food labels.
- Take particular care with children's diets. (See page 87 for recommended levels for children.)

For more information on salt

Consensus Action on Salt and Health (CASH)

Runs an annual campaign to reduce the amount of salt in our diet, including a Salt Awareness Day.
www.actiononsalt.org.uk

Food Standards Agency

Includes the *Sid the Slug* salt campaign.
www.salt.gov.uk

Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition

www.sacn.gov.uk

References

1 Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition. 2003. *Salt and Health*. London: The Stationery Office.

2 Department of Health. 1991. *Dietary Reference Values for Food Energy and Nutrients for the United Kingdom*. London: HMSO.

3 Food Standards Agency website. Accessed on 18 January 2005 from: www.salt.gov.uk

4 Henderson L, Irving K, Gregory J et al. 2003. *National Diet and Nutrition Survey: Adults Aged 19 to 64 Years. Volume 3 Vitamin and Mineral Intake and Urinary Analytes*. London: The Stationery Office.