

**FACULTY OF MEDICINE AND HEALTH SCIENCES
STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY**

MEDIA STATEMENT

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World Salt Awareness Week: 12 – 18

Information sheet developed by the Nutrition Information Centre Stellenbosch University (NICUS).

Fives ways to use 5g of salt or less per day

World Salt Awareness Week is marked from 12-18 March 2018. Many people use far more salt than required, increasing their risk of developing high blood pressure which can cause stroke, heart disease and heart attacks.

When using too much salt, excess sodium (a mineral found in salt) accumulates in the bloodstream, causing the body to retain water in order to dilute the sodium. This increases the amount of fluid surrounding cells and the volume of blood in the bloodstream. Increased blood volume creates more work for the heart and places pressure on blood vessels. Over time, the extra work and pressure can stiffen blood vessels, leading to high blood pressure, stroke, heart attack and heart failure.

Research also shows that a high intake of salt, sodium, or salty foods is linked to an increased risk of stomach cancer.

How much salt is recommended?

Many people do not realise they are eating too much salt. The World Health Organisation recommends that adults eat less than 5g of salt (a teaspoon) a day. However, a reduction of salt intake by just two grams a day will reduce your risk of cardiovascular events by 20%.

It is challenging to control the amount of salt you eat. Not all foods that contain salt actually taste salty, and people could be unaware that they are even consuming salt. Reducing your salt intake can also be tricky as a lot of prepared food already contains salt, which you can't take out.

Most of the salt in our diet (up to 60%) is found in processed foods, and the main culprits are margarine, butter spreads, stock cubes, soup powders, breakfast cereals, bread and savoury snacks. The remaining 40% of salt in the diet is added at the table.

Here are five easy strategies that you can follow to help you achieve the recommended limit of 5g of salt a day:

1. Check food labels for salt content

If “sodium” or “salt” is listed among the first three ingredients on a product’s food label or ingredients list, the food probably contains a lot of salt. Foods that contain more than 1,5g of salt per 100g are high in salt and should be avoided. Foods that have less than 0,3g of salt per 100g are low in salt and are a better choice. Also look for the “Heart Mark” on food packaging to identify foods with a lower salt content. Be wary of products claiming to be ‘low in sodium’ as some of these products have been found to contain as much as 5mg sodium per 100g! Also check the food labels for the following ingredients: monosodium glutamate (MSG), sodium nitrate, sodium bicarbonate and soy sauce or any sodium-containing additive, as these also contain high levels of sodium.

2. Take salt and salty condiments off the table

Do not add extra salt to food at the table. Don’t be fooled into thinking that ‘fancier’ types of salt are healthy. Pink, black, rock, crystal or flake salt all have the same effect on your blood pressure as standard table salt. Less refined salts may contain more nutrients than everyday table salt, although in such small amounts that it could easily be sourced from other foods in your diet. Bigger crystals also taste less salty, and you are likely to add more than refined salt.

3. Eat more fresh vegetable and fruit

Fresh vegetables and fruit are naturally low in salt and naturally high in potassium – which actually counters the effects of sodium. Drain and rinse canned vegetables and legumes before eating, as the brine it is preserved in contains a lot of salt. Cut down on bread, cheese and processed meat, as these and other processed foods are high in sodium and low in potassium.

4. Use herbs, garlic and citrus to flavour food

Flavour your food with herbs, spices and other items that do not contain salt, e.g. herbs, pepper, curry, vinegar, onions, peppers, garlic, ginger, rosemary and lemon juice. In addition to adding flavour to your food, herbs and spices are also a source of antioxidants, essential oils, vitamins, phytosterols and other plants derived nutrient substances that are good for your health.

5. Gradually reduce the amount of salt in recipes

It is easier to adjust to a lower salt intake if you gradually reduce your use over time, giving your palate time to get used to the taste. Avoid salt-containing flavouring agents such as onion salt, celery salt, garlic salt, vegetable salt, barbeque and chicken spices, meat tenderisers, commercial sauces, soups, gravies and stock cubes.

Practical hints on how to replace food with a high-salt content

Foods with a high salt content	Rather use
Processed meat like viennas, cold meats, ham, hamburger patties, bully beef and beef and pork sausages	Unprocessed chicken, meat or fish, meatballs or other mince dishes, ostrich or venison
Canned fish, dried fish and smoked fish	Fresh or frozen fish products
Salty spreads like meat and vegetable extracts, fish paste, liver or meat spreads, pâté and cheese spreads	Different types of jams and cottage cheese
Cheeses with a high salt content, e.g. Blaauwkrantz, Roquefort, Parmesan and Feta cheese	Cheddar, Gouda, Brie, Mozzarella, or Ricotta in small amounts
Salty snacks like chips, salty biscuits, biltong, dried sausage, salted nuts, salted popcorn, olives or pickles	Provititas or cream crackers, unsalted nuts, seeds and popcorn
Fast food	Home-cooked meals

ENDS

MEDIA ENQUIRIES

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The information explosion in the science of nutrition often creates the impression that available information is contradictory. Consequently, it is no longer easy to distinguish between fact, misinformation and fiction. The Nutrition Information Centre of the Stellenbosch University (NICUS) was established to act as a reliable and independent source of nutrition information.