



Salt

Salt is sodium chloride (NaCl). Both sodium and chloride are essential for health. Sodium has important functions involved with maintaining the fluid balance throughout the body, even down to the cell level.

Sodium is present in many natural foods such as fruits, grains and vegetables in small amounts, even in many water supplies (this is not as salt; the sodium is present with other minerals). It is not necessary to add salt itself to foods even in hot climates, in order to supply most people's sodium needs.

Eating too much salt is linked to an increased risk of high blood pressure – hypertension – which itself is associated with very high risks of stroke and heart disease. Only a few people who are hypertensive are not affected by salt in their diet.

Blood pressure: Blood in the blood vessels (arteries and veins) is under pressure (blood pressure), because of the heart beating.

Definitions of hypertension

When blood vessels are healthy, blood flows through them easily. When vessels become hard or blocked, the blood cannot flow as easily. The heart therefore has to work harder to move the same amount of blood. This is how high blood pressure develops.



(One high result is not enough to show a problem; another measurement should be taken at a different time, to confirm the diagnosis.)

Causes of hypertension

Factors that contribute to hypertension include:

- ⚡ age – as we age, blood pressure naturally increases;*
- ⚡ genetic/hereditary tendency to develop hypertension;*
- ⚡ obesity and overweight;
- ⚡ too much salt/sodium;
- ⚡ drinking too much alcohol;
- ⚡ smoking and use of tobacco;
- ⚡ not enough activity/exercise;
- ⚡ stress;
- ⚡ diabetes (high blood sugar damages blood vessel walls); and
- ⚡ pregnancy (many pregnant women develop high blood pressure).

	Systolic (mm Hg)	Diastolic (mm Hg)
Normal	Less than 130	Less than 85
Grade 1 hypertension (mild)	140–159	90–99
Grade 2 hypertension (moderate)	160–179	100–109
Grade 3 hypertension (severe)	More than 180	More than 110

(* cannot be controlled)



How to prevent or control hypertension

- ⚡ Stop smoking – the most important issue.
- ⚡ Lose weight if overweight.
- ⚡ Drink alcohol with care – no more than two alcoholic drinks (measures) per day. Avoid binge drinking.
- ⚡ Eat less salt and fewer salty foods.
- ⚡ Eat a healthy, balanced diet with plenty of variety. Include plenty of fruits and vegetables.
- ⚡ Increase physical activity. Walking regularly is helpful.



Eating less salt

- ⚡ Avoid adding salt or soy sauce at the table and in cooking.
- ⚡ Eat less of the salty foods such as: savoury snacks (potato chips), sauces (ketchup and meat gravies), soy sauce, bread, margarine, butter, cheese, ramen, canned meats (corned beef and spam).
- ⚡ You will even find salt in things like biscuits and cookies, many canned/tinned foods, cakes, pastries, many frozen foods.
- ⚡ We become used to high salt levels in our food, and in time can also get used to eating less salt.
- ⚡ Instead of using salt, try using herbs and spices, lemon juice, vinegar, garlic or fresh chillies for extra flavour.



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