



**IRISH HEART  
FOUNDATION**  
Fighting Heart Disease & Stroke

[www.irishheart.ie](http://www.irishheart.ie)

# CUT DOWN ON SALT

**TO REDUCE YOUR RISK  
OF HEART DISEASE  
AND STROKE**



## The Irish Heart Foundation

The Irish Heart Foundation is the national charity fighting heart disease and stroke. More people in Ireland die from these causes than from cancer, road deaths and suicide combined. We work to bring hope, relief and a better future to Irish families. We support pioneering medical research, campaign for improved patient care and provide vital support and information for patients. In hospitals, schools and workplaces, we support, educate and train people to save lives. As a charity we depend on your ongoing support - through your donations or by giving of your time as a volunteer or on a training course.

For more information or to donate, visit our website: [www.irishheart.ie](http://www.irishheart.ie)

## Heart and Stroke Helpline:

1890 432 787 (Monday to Friday 10.00am to 5.00pm)

Irish Heart Foundation,  
50 Ringsend Road,  
Dublin 4.

**Phone:** +353 1 668 5001

**Fax:** +353 1 668 5896

**Email:** [info@irishheart.ie](mailto:info@irishheart.ie)

## Funding

The Irish Heart Foundation is grateful to *safefood* for the funding of this booklet.



# Contents

Salt and heart disease .....	3
What is salt? .....	4
How much salt should you have each day? .....	5
How much salt are you eating? .....	5
Simple ways to cut down on salt .....	7
Industry's role in reducing salt in foods .....	8
Look at the food label .....	9
Eating out .....	10
What about other types of salt .....	11
Common sense with salt .....	11

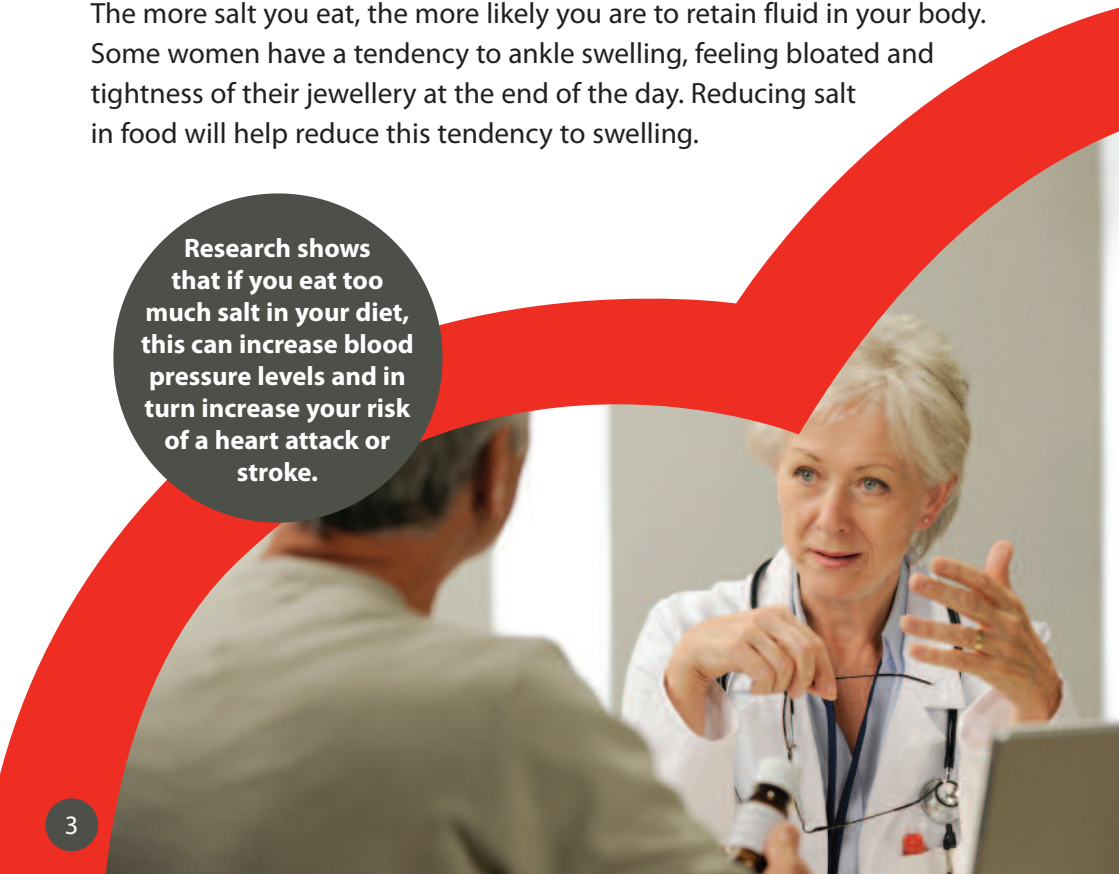
## Salt and heart disease - what happens when you take in more salt than you need?

People in Ireland are eating too much salt, which is linked to high blood pressure especially as you get older. Blood pressure shows the amount of work that your heart has to do to pump blood around your body. When the pressure inside your blood vessels stays at a high level for a long period of time, it can damage your heart and blood vessels, leading to a heart attack or stroke.

If everyone in Ireland reduced salt intake by a half teaspoon (3 grams per day), this would prevent approximately 900 deaths each year from stroke and heart attack.

The more salt you eat, the more likely you are to retain fluid in your body. Some women have a tendency to ankle swelling, feeling bloated and tightness of their jewellery at the end of the day. Reducing salt in food will help reduce this tendency to swelling.

**Research shows that if you eat too much salt in your diet, this can increase blood pressure levels and in turn increase your risk of a heart attack or stroke.**



### **Time to cut down on salt...**

Salt in very small amounts is essential to your health. A little salt is needed for maintaining water balance, healthy blood pressure and for healthy muscles and nerves.

However, many people eat more than twice the amount of salt their bodies need. Research shows that if you eat too much salt in your diet, this can increase blood pressure levels and in turn increase your risk of a heart attack or stroke.

### **What is salt?**

Salt is a nutrient with the name Sodium Chloride. It is the sodium part of salt that causes the problem. Sodium is also found in other forms, for example in baking soda (sodium bicarbonate) for making bread and in a product for curing meats (sodium nitrite/nitrate).



### **Where does this salt come from?**

Most of the salt we eat – about 65-70% – comes from processed foods, fast food, canteen and restaurant food. About 15-20% is added at home in cooking or at the table and only 15% occurs naturally in food. So to reduce salt in food, you need to use less salt yourself, eat more fresh foods and less snack and processed foods. The food industry also needs to play a role and some food companies are already doing this with clearer labelling and reducing salt in their products.

## So how much salt should you have each day?

The body needs about 4 grams of salt each day and an acceptable maximum level is 6 grams or 1 teaspoon of salt per day. Many people, especially men, exceed this level of salt intake and eat on average about 9-10 grams of salt per day.

Children should eat much smaller amounts, depending on their age. School children should eat less than 4 grams per day and younger children should eat only the minimum amount of salt.

Adults: Less than **6 grams of salt or 2.4 grams of sodium** per day  
Children: Less than **4 grams of salt or 1.6 grams of sodium** per day

Remember, most salt in our diet comes from processed foods, fast food, canteen and restaurant food.

## How much salt are you eating?

Some everyday foods, many of which are processed or restaurant or fast foods, can be high in salt. Foods such as tinned or cartons of soup, ready-made sauces, sausages, bacon, pizzas and pot noodles. One way to choose lower salt options is to check the food label (see page 9), as the level of salt can vary from brand to brand.

Other everyday foods such as bread, some breakfast cereals and cheese contain medium to high levels of salt. This does not mean you should cut out these important nutritious foods. However reading the food labels can help you find the lower salt option and also these should be consumed in line with the recommendations from the Food Pyramid  
[www.dohc.ie/publications/yourguide\\_foodpyramid.html](http://www.dohc.ie/publications/yourguide_foodpyramid.html)

Manufacturers of these foods are being encouraged to gradually reduce salt levels in high salt products.

## Swap it:

### High salt

Carton, tinned  
or packet soup



Fries, battered  
fish and peas



Crisps



### Low salt

Bowl of  
homemade soup



Fish dish



Unsalted popcorn



### As a guide, the high salt foods you should cut down on are:

- Packet and tinned soups
- Instant noodles
- Ketchups and sauces
- Sausages and burgers
- Salty savoury snacks

### Imagine drinking a mouthful of seawater? ... Not very nice!

Some of the foods we eat regularly, for example soups, some cereals, bacon and sausages, have the same levels of sodium as seawater. One cup of soup has the same amount of salt as two cups of seawater and one bowl of some cereals contains the same amount of salt as one cup of seawater.



## Simple ways to cut down on salt

- Gradually reduce the amount of salt you add at the table and during cooking.
- Use alternative flavourings such as black pepper, herbs, spices, garlic and lemon juice.
- Limit the use of stock cubes, gravy granules and ready-made sauces, which are all high in salt. Try making homemade stock or sauces instead.
- Choose fresh vegetables and lean meat more often than tinned or processed varieties.
- Try and make home-cooked meals the norm during the week.  
*(For easy recipe ideas or to purchase the Irish Heart Foundation's cookbook 'I Love Good Food' visit [www.irishheart.ie](http://www.irishheart.ie). Also visit [www.safefood.eu](http://www.safefood.eu)).* If you do need to use ready meals on occasion, look for reduced salt options.
- Get out of the habit of having instant high salt foods at home. In fact do not even put them in your shopping basket!
- Do not add any salt to food made for babies or children. Children should eat less salt than adults and these guidelines will help you reduce the amount of salt your children will eat. Regular family meals will help encourage your children to eat more fresh foods and home-cooked meals.



### Watch your portion size

To reduce your chances of becoming overweight or obese, you should watch your portion sizes of food carefully. This will also help reduce your salt intake, especially if you reduce the portion size of high salt foods.

### Take it slowly

It takes you a number of weeks to change a habit and build it naturally into your lifestyle. The more salty foods you eat, the more your taste buds will be accustomed to salty foods.



When you start reducing your own salt intake, foods may taste a little bland at first, but gradually over about 6 weeks your taste buds will adjust and you will get used to less salty foods. You will then start to taste and enjoy the flavours in your food.



If you are feeding babies and children, you should not add salt to their food. As a result they won't develop a taste or a liking for salty foods.

## Industry's role in reducing salt in foods

You can begin to reduce your own salt intake but to reach the recommended target of less than 6 grams per day would mean avoiding many processed foods, something that is not really practical. Therefore, the food industry needs to play a role. Some food companies are already reducing the salt content of their foods and providing clearer labelling so that you know how much salt or sodium is in the product.

If the food industry continues to make a gradual reduction in salt added to foods, salt intake could be reduced without you even being aware, as a gradual reduction is not detectable by the human palate.

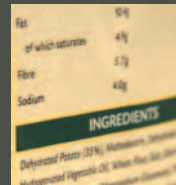
*Vote with your feet - buy from food companies and retailers that already offer reduced salt products.*

### Supermarket shopping

Take a careful look at your weekly shopping list and gradually stop buying foods high in salt. Some leading Irish supermarket chains have already started lowering the salt added to their own-brand products and are actively encouraging their suppliers to do the same.

## Look at the food label

Food labels can be confusing at the best of times, but even more so when it comes to salt. This is because it is usually the amount of sodium, rather than salt, in grams per 100 grams of the food, that is listed on food labels.



To work out how much salt is in a food, you need to multiply the sodium figure by 2.5. For example, if a food has one gram of sodium per 100g – that means it has 2.5 grams of salt.

**2.5 grams of salt = 1 gram of sodium**

Foods high in salt contain 1.5 grams, or more, of salt per 100 grams and at the other end of the scale, foods low in salt contain 0.3 grams, or less, of salt.

A quick guide to comparing whether foods are high or in low salt is to see how many grams of salt the product contains per 100 grams.

**HIGH**

**Over 1.5 grams**

**MEDIUM**

**0.3 grams to 1.5 grams**

**GREEN**

**0.3 grams and under**

This helps you compare how much salt is in different brands of a product. Remember that the amount you eat of a particular food affects how much salt you will get from it.

Unfortunately at present not all food labels list sodium or salt in the list of ingredients and some do not give the amount of salt or sodium, either per 100 grams of food or per serving. In the near future, new European laws on food labelling will standardise information on food labels, for example, listing the amount of salt. This will make food labels easier to understand for the consumer.



## Eating out

More and more people eat out nowadays – especially informal eating out like takeaways, burgers and fish and chips. It's important to keep in mind that when someone else cooks your food, you do not have control over the amount of salt, fat and sugar they add to it. Try not to add extra salt yourself and try to choose foods that are seasoned with other natural flavourings, for example spices in a curry.

### Top tips for eating out!

1. Always taste food before you add any seasoning.
2. Try freshly ground black pepper instead of adding salt.
3. Choose fresh foods regularly.
4. Cut down on the amount of salty meats you choose such as bacon, gammon and ham.
5. Choose spicy foods when they appear on the menu. With a spicy flavour very little salt is needed. (Look out for sauces that have added soya, increasing the salt level).
6. Try a fruit, vegetable or salad based starter – both light and filling.
7. Ask if the sauce/dressing can be served on the side – you can control how much you wish to use. Look for sauces without added salt, soya, cream or butter. Try tomato, spicy or fruit based sauces instead.



## What about other types of salt?

Any form of salt can increase blood pressure. Seasalt, rock salt and garlic salt have the same salt or sodium content as common salt. Salts described as low salt are mixtures of sodium and potassium, where potassium has been added to reduce the sodium content. If you have kidney failure, heart failure or have diabetes you should not use a low salt variety without medical advice.



The best advice to reduce your salt content is to use a variety of alternative flavourings or seasonings to salt, such as black pepper, spices or lemon juice.

## Common sense with salt

Reduce the amount of salt you use in cooking and at the table.

- Season your food with black pepper, herbs, spices, garlic or lemon juice instead of adding salt.
- Enjoy fresh vegetables, lean meat and home-cooked meals more often.
- Keep convenience ready-meals to a minimum.
- Check the label for salt or sodium content and choose lower salt options.
- Cut down on high salt foods – salty meats, tinned or packet soup and sauces and salted savoury snacks such as crisps.

## Also important for heart health

- Choose at least five servings of fruit and vegetables every day.
- Eat less fat, especially saturated fat.
- Eat oily fish (e.g. salmon, mackerel, trout) at least once a week.
- Be more active – for at least 30 minutes most days.
- If you smoke, try to stop. Phone the National Smokers' Quitline 1850 201 203 for advice and support.
- Have a regular blood pressure and cholesterol check with your family doctor.

## Please make a donation today

The Irish Heart Foundation is Ireland's national charity dedicated to the reduction of death and disability from heart disease and stroke. Over 90% of our funding comes from public and business donations. We depend on your goodwill and generosity to continue our work.

**If you found this booklet useful, please help our charity to continue to provide heart & stroke information by donating today.**

### You can make your donation today:

**By post:** Irish Heart Foundation, 50 Ringsend Road, Dublin 4

**Online:** [www.irishheart.ie](http://www.irishheart.ie)

**By phone:** 01 6685001

### Personal Details

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_

### Credit or debit card (one off donation)

Amount:  €250\*  €100  €50  €25  Other € \_\_\_\_\_

Card Number:

Exp Date:   /   Security Code\*\*:

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

\* If you donate €250 in one year (or €21 per month) we can claim tax back at no cost to you.

\*\* Last 3 digits on the signature strip on the reverse of your card.

The Irish Heart Foundation is committed to best practice in fundraising and adheres to the **statement of guiding principles for fundraising** promoting transparency, honesty and accountability. Any personal information you provide will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003.

## SEPA Direct Debit Mandate

---

### Unique Mandate Reference:

**Creditor Identifier: IE02ZZZ306322**

By signing this mandate form, you authorise (A) the Irish Heart Foundation to send instructions to your bank to debit your account and (B) your bank to debit your account in accordance with the instruction from the Irish Heart Foundation.

As part of your rights, you are entitled to a refund from your bank under the terms and conditions of your agreement with your bank. A refund must be claimed within 8 weeks starting from the date on which you account was debited. Your rights are explained in a statement that you can obtain from your bank.

Please complete all the fields below marked\*

\*Bank Name: \_\_\_\_\_

\*Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\*Account number (IBAN): \_\_\_\_\_

\* Swift BIC: \_\_\_\_\_

Creditor Name: **IRISH HEART FOUNDATION**

Creditor Address: **50 RINGSEND ROAD, DUBLIN 4, IRELAND**

\*Type of Payment:  Recurrent (Monthly)  One-off Payment

\* Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ \*Date Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return completed form to the Irish Heart Foundation.

---

My monthly instalment amount is:  €21\*  €18  €15  €10  
 Other € \_\_\_\_\_ per month

\*A regular gift of €21 per month could be worth an additional €9 from the Revenue Commissioners per month at no extra cost to you.

Your first contribution will be taken on either the 2nd or the 20th of the next available month. Please select which date you prefer.  2nd  20th

*You will be notified in writing ten days in advance of your first direct debit. If you wish to cancel within 7 days of a direct debit payment please contact your own bank.*

### Preferences

---

I would like to hear about other IHF events, activities, awareness campaigns and appeals.

Yes

Do you need a postal receipt:  Yes  No

## More information

### Useful websites:

**[www.irishheart.ie](http://www.irishheart.ie)**

**[www.stroke.ie](http://www.stroke.ie)**

[www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)

[www.bhf.org.uk](http://www.bhf.org.uk)

[www.safefood.eu](http://www.safefood.eu) (Helpline: 1890 404 567)

### Other Irish Heart Foundation publications:

Manage your stress

A healthy blood pressure

A healthy cholesterol

Healthy eating

Be active

Quit smoking

Lose weight

**Heart and Stroke Helpline:**

1890 432 787

Monday to Friday 10am to 5pm

[www.irishheart.ie](http://www.irishheart.ie)



Funded by Safefood



Irish Heart Foundation,  
50 Ringsend Road,  
Dublin 4

**T:** +353 1 668 5001

**F:** +353 1 668 5896

**Email:** [info@irishheart.ie](mailto:info@irishheart.ie)

**Heart and Stroke Helpline:**

1890 432 787

Monday to Friday 10am to 5pm

**Web:**

[www.irishheart.ie](http://www.irishheart.ie)

[www.stroke.ie](http://www.stroke.ie)

Registered Charity  
Number CHY 5507

December 2012



The information provided in this booklet was correct and accurate at the time of publication to the best of the Irish Heart Foundation's knowledge.