



**Irish Heart  
Foundation**

[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. Heart disease and stroke are one of Ireland's biggest killers, taking the lives of almost 9,000 people every year. We support, educate and train people to save lives, campaign for patients, promote positive health strategies, support research and provide vital public information. 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)

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

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

**Research shows that if there is 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 there is 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?

By salt, we mean table salt, which is otherwise known as sodium chloride. It is the sodium part of salt that causes the problem as too much sodium can cause high blood pressure which can lead to a heart attack or stroke. 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?

You may think you don't eat much salt, but there's more to it than what you sprinkle on your food. 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 the amount of salt you consume, you need to use less salt yourself, eat more fresh foods and less processed foods. The food industry also needs to play a role and some food companies are already doing this with clearer labelling and by reducing salt in their products.

## How much salt should you have each day?

Salt in very small amounts (about 4 grams) is needed for health. It helps to maintain water balance, a healthy blood pressure and healthy muscles and nerves. However, you should aim to eat no more than 6 grams of salt a day. That's about one level teaspoon. This includes salt you add to your food and salt already in it. Many people 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

## How much salt are you eating?













Some everyday foods, many of which are processed or fast foods, can be high in salt. Some examples are 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. These should also 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.

## Easy swaps

Higher in salt		Lower in salt	
Tinned chicken noodle soup		Homemade chicken and vegetable soup	
Fries, battered fish and peas		Fish dish	
Crisps		Unsalted popcorn	
Ham and cheese sandwich with crisps		Chicken salad sandwich with fruit	
Bacon roll with ketchup		Egg roll	
Sugary high salt breakfast cereal		Wholegrain breakfast cereal	

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

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



## Simple ways to cut down on salt

- Gradually reduce the amount of salt you add at the table and during cooking.
- Keep salt away from the table and kitchen counters. If it's not within reach, you're less likely to put it on your food.
- Taste your food before you season it. Gradually reduce your salt intake to readjust your taste buds.
- Use alternative flavourings such as black pepper, herbs, spices, garlic, balsamic vinegar, chili 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.
- Swap salty, processed meats like bacon and sausages for white meats like chicken and turkey or vegetable proteins and pulses as an alternative. Look for tinned beans with no salt added.
- Try and make home-cooked meals the norm during the week. If you do need to use ready meals on occasion, look for reduced salt options.
- You can freeze homemade meals so you have a lower salt alternative to takeaways and ready meals mid week.
- Keep an eye on hidden salt by reading food labels so you can choose lower salt products and brands to add to your shopping basket.
- Do not add any salt to food made for babies or children. Children should eat less salt than adults.



### 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 salt intake, gradually over about 6 weeks your taste buds will adjust and you will get used to less salty foods. Remember flavour doesn't only come from salt so instead we recommend trying alternatives such as dried herbs, spices, black pepper, chilli or lemon. You will then start to taste and enjoy the flavours in your food.



## Industry's role in reducing salt in foods

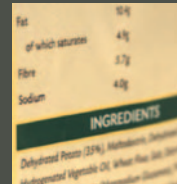
You can begin to reduce your own salt intake but to reach the recommended target of less than 6 grams per day is quite difficult as much of the salt we consume is already in the food we eat, particularly processed foods. Therefore, the food industry needs to play a role. Some food companies are already 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.***

## Look at the food label

The easiest way to work out how much salt you're eating is to check the food label (nutritional information) on the packaging.



You might see salt written as sodium on a food label. Sodium is just another way of talking about the salt content of food. It's measured differently to salt. If you can only see a listing for sodium on a food label, you can work out how much salt is in the product by multiplying the sodium (in grams) by 2.5.

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

## How much is too much salt per 100g?

### FOOD SHOPPING CARD

Check how much fat, sugar and salt is in your food

	Sugars	Fat	Saturates	Salt
<b>HIGH</b> per 100g	Over 22.5g	Over 17.5g	Over 5g	Over 1.5g
<b>MEDIUM</b> per 100g	Between 5g and 22.5g	Between 3g and 17.5g	Between 1.5g and 5g	Between 0.3g and 1.5g
<b>LOW</b> per 100g	5g and below	3g and below	1.5g and below	0.3g and below

The amount you eat of a particular food affects how much sugars, fat, saturates and salt you will get from it.

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### DAILY MAXIMUM INTAKE OF SALT

Irish Heart

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**ADULTS** **6g per day (2.4g sodium)\***

\*To calculate salt from sodium, multiply sodium by 2.5

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**CHILDREN**

- Up to 6 months old: **less than 1g salt a day (0.4g sodium)**
- 7 to 12 months: **1g salt a day (0.4g sodium)**
- 1 to 3 years: **2g salt a day (0.8g sodium)**
- 4 to 6 years: **3g salt a day (1.2g sodium)**
- 7 to 10 years: **5g salt a day (2g sodium)**
- Children over 11 years: **6g salt a day (2.4g sodium)**

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

This helps you compare how much salt is in different brands of a product. When you're looking at how much salt is in your food, make sure you know whether you're looking at the amount of salt 'per portion' or the amount 'per 100g'.

New European laws have standardised information on food labels so that it is now mandatory to include the amount of salt per 100g of food.



## Eating out

More and more people eat out nowadays – especially informal eating out like takeaways, lunches or dinners out. It's important to keep in mind that when someone else cooks your food, you do not have control over the amount of salt 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. Cut down on the amount of processed salty meats you choose such as bacon, gammon and ham and try to choose white meats like chicken and turkey, fresh fish or vegetable proteins and pulses as an alternative.
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. 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, pink salt, crystal salt, 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 diabetes you should not use a low salt variety without medical advice.



Replacing salt with a salt substitute will reduce the amount of sodium you consume but won't change your fondness for a salty taste. Flavour doesn't only come from salt so instead we recommend trying alternatives such as dried herbs, spices, black pepper, chilli or lemon to help reduce your salt intake.

### Also important for heart health

Eating less salt is just one part of eating a balanced diet and maintaining a healthy blood pressure and heart. It's also important to:

- Eat at least 5-7 portions of fruit and vegetables everyday.
- Swap bad fats for good fats. This means choosing less butter, processed and red meats and full fat products and swapping for heart-healthy fats like nuts, rapeseed or olive oil and oily fish.
- Eat two portions of fish per week at least one being oily (e.g. salmon, mackerel, trout).
- Be more active - for at least 30 minutes most days.
- Take a look at your diet as a whole and if high fat/ high sugar foods (e.g. sugar sweetened drinks, biscuits, cake, sweets, crisps) are featuring regularly think about how you can cut down.
- Drink alcohol within maximum recommended limits (if at all).
- If you smoke, try to stop. Phone the National Smokers' Quitline 1800 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 and stroke information by donating today.**

### You can make your donation today:

**By post:** 17-19 Rathmines Road Lower, Dublin 6, D06 C780

**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

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### 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 your 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: **17-19 RATHMINES ROAD LOWER, DUBLIN 6, D06 C780**

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

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

Please return completed form to the Irish Heart Foundation.

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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

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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.irisheart.ie](http://www.irisheart.ie)**

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

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

[www.safefood.eu](http://www.safefood.eu)

### Other Irish Heart Foundation publications:

Manage your stress

A healthy blood pressure

A healthy cholesterol

Healthy eating

Be active

Quit smoking

Lose weight



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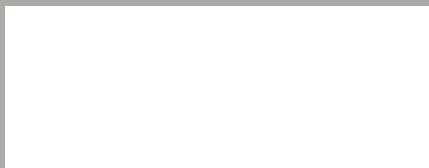
**Web:** [www.irishheart.ie](http://www.irishheart.ie)



## Funding

The Irish Heart Foundation is the national charity fighting heart disease and stroke and relies on charitable donations for 90 per cent of its funding. We support, educate and train people to save lives, campaign for patients, promote positive health strategies, support research and provide vital public information. We need your support - through donations, as a volunteer or on our training courses.

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