



## **Salt;**

Despite long running campaigns illustrating the dangers of too much salt in our diets, it appears we are still consuming too much. The food safety authority describes our salt intake as 'alarming'. It is estimated that the average Irish person consumes 9.56g of salt per day. That is over twice the recommended dietary allowance of 4g per day. Although the body only needs about 4 grams of salt each day, currently there is an acceptable maximum level of 6 grams or 1 teaspoon of salt per day.

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

Salt is made up of two components: sodium and chloride. Every gram of salt contains roughly 0.42 grams of sodium. It is the sodium part of salt that causes potential health problems. Any form of salt can increase blood pressure. Sea-salt and rock salt have the same salt or sodium content as common salt. In Ireland we eat too much salt and this is having a huge impact on our health.

The food industry is committed to reducing salt levels in food and major progress has been made on the reduction of salt in foods to date. Always read and compare food labels to ensure you are getting the healthier choice.

## **What are we eating that is providing so much salt?**

It is estimated that about 80% of salt consumed in the Irish diet comes from processed foods, fast foods, canteen and restaurant foods. The salt we add to our food in cooking and at the table only accounts for about 10-15% and just 5% occurs naturally in food. Our fast paced lifestyle leads us to choose fast paced foods which are often laden with salt. Many people are aware that an excess salt intake is linked to high blood pressure, especially as you get older, fewer realise that high intakes can increase the risk of swelling, bloating, stomach cancer and potentially osteoporosis.

## **Why is salt reduction so important for Irish health?**

Cardiovascular disease is the highest cause of death in Ireland and high blood pressure is a risk factor in the development of cardiovascular disease. However, high blood pressure is described as a modifiable risk, that means one that we can change. Research indicates that high dietary salt intake can raise blood pressure. There is also evidence to show that reducing our salt intake can help reduce our blood pressure and therefore our risk of cardiovascular disease.

The Irish Heart foundation estimates that 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.

Gastric cancer remains the second leading cause of cancer death worldwide, accounting for about 10% of newly diagnosed cancers. Research published in the British Journal of Cancer suggested that people who eat high levels of salt on a daily basis raise their risk of developing stomach cancer. Also Osteoporosis affects 50% of Irish women and 20% of Irish men over the age of 50. Women are at a greater risk due to the hormone changes around the time of menopause. Now, new research indicates that a high salt intake may increase the risk of this disease too.

### **Reading food labels;**

The recommended dietary allowance for salt is; less than 6 grams of salt or 2.4 grams of sodium per day for adults and less than 4 grams of salt or 1.6 grams of sodium per day for children. Reading and comparing food labels is important and it can sometimes be difficult with salt as usually labels state the amount of sodium, rather than salt, in grams per 100 grams of the food. Some labels will also tell you how many grams of salt are in the product. If not, you can work out how much salt is in a food by multiplying the sodium figure by 2.5.

### **Top tips for cutting back on salt;**

- Always taste food before adding salt.
- Gradually reduce the amount of salt you add during cooking.
- Experiment with different herbs and spices to flavour foods.
- Chose fresh foods more often.
- Try not to rely on convenience foods.
- Check and compare labels for salt or sodium content and choose lower salt options.
- Cut down on high salt foods – salty meats, tinned or packet soups and sauces and salted savoury snacks.



*Sets the Healthy You free!*