

# Salt

Ordinary table salt is made up of two different chemical parts – sodium and chloride. Sodium is also found in baking powder, self-raising flour, monosodium glutamate and many preservatives and medicines. Sodium is naturally present in varying amounts in most foods.

## How much sodium do we need?

The recommended dietary intake (RDI) is 920-2300mg per day. The recommended daily maximum of 2300mg is little more than the amount in a teaspoon of salt. New Zealanders consume, on average, about 990-4600mg each day:

- 75% from processed foods,
- 15% from use at the table and in cooking and
- less than 10% from fruit, vegetables and meat.

## How does salt affect our health?

If we could reduce New Zealanders' average intake of salt we would significantly reduce blood pressure and the burden of cardiovascular disease.

Excessive sodium intake has also been linked to other conditions such as heart failure, oedema and kidney problems, which are worsened by water retention.

## The sodium-potassium interaction

- Our bodies are designed for a high potassium diet, not a high salt diet. The NZ diet is typically low in potassium and high in salt.
- Potassium is very protective and lowers blood pressure.
- Food processing tends to lower potassium, and increase sodium content.
- It is better to eat less processed foods, such as fruit, vegetables, wholegrain breads and cereals.

## How to reduce salt in our diet

- Most of the salt we eat comes from processed and manufactured foods. Foods high in salt include potato chips, salted nuts, pickled foods, vegemite, marmite, soy sauce and processed meats such as luncheon and salami and processed cheese. **Reducing our intake of these foods is the best way to reduce our salt intake.**
- Eat meals without adding a lot of extra salt – start by using less salt in cooking, then try adding less salt at the table.
- Use herbs, spices and vegetable or fruit juice to add flavour instead of stocks and sauce mixes.

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This information is not intended to replace the advice of your doctor or individual consultation with a Registered Dietitian. This information may only be used in its entirety.

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- Cooking food in minimal water or in the microwave helps keep flavour so extra salt is not needed.
- When using salt, iodised table salt is recommended.
- Ask for no added salt if buying takeaways.
- Choose snacks without added salt.
- Choose vegetables and fish canned in water rather than brine.
- Look for salt-reduced foods when shopping. These have 25 percent less salt than their regular counterparts. Items labelled “salt-reduced” include cheeses, cereals, margarines, breads and crackers.

### What about other types of salt?

Below is a comparison of different salts or salt-substitutes...

Salt	Percentage sodium chloride
Salt (table salt)	97 %
Rock salt	97 %
Cooking salt	97 %
Celery, vegetable, herb or garlic salt	67 –71 %
Sea salt (made by evaporating sea water)	66 %
Salt-substitutes	48 –53 %
Salt-free substitutes	Less than 1 percent
Herbs such as basil, oregano and garlic	0.2 percent

### What about iodised salt?

Iodine is an essential mineral. It is an integral part of the thyroid hormone that controls human growth and development. Historically, NZ soils were known to be low in iodine and this resulted in a high rate of goitre. Since the 1920s iodine has been added to our table salt. Iodine is not added to salt used in processed foods.

When using salt always use iodised salt.

### Salt and cramps

People often think that cramps are caused by a lack of salt. They believe that extra salt will cure their cramps.

However, the most common reasons for cramping are a lack of muscle warm-ups and a lack of water.

### Check the labels!

- “Low sodium” and “low salt” foods must have a sodium content no greater than 120mg per 100g of food.
- “Salt-free” or “unsalted” foods must not contain any added salt at all, nor any ingredient that is made with added salt.
- “Salt-reduced” foods generally have 25 percent less salt than their regular counterparts.

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