

Salt and Cancer Risk



Key Messages

Salt is sodium chloride. Diets high in salt have been linked to an increased risk of stomach cancer.

Too much salt (sodium) can also lead to high blood pressure.

The body does need some salt. However in most circumstances we get all we need naturally from foods. There is no need to add salt to foods.

It is a good idea to eat a low-salt diet and try flavouring foods with herbs and spices instead.

But I don't add salt to my food!

Most of the salt we eat comes from packaged and take-away foods such as pizza, pies, sauces, condiments, seasonings, dressings, soups, noodles, margarines, bread and breakfast cereals. When shopping, read labels and choose products with less sodium. Foods that are very salty such as yeast extract spreads, olives, cheese and anchovies should be used sparingly.

Look for "no added salt" or "low salt" foods in the supermarket. A "low salt" food has less than 120mg of sodium per 100g. "Reduced salt" products can be purchased too if these are the lowest salt options available.

How much salt is ok?

You should try and eat no more than 6g of salt (2300mg sodium) each day. This is about 1½ teaspoons of salt. This includes salt in prepared foods so it does not allow for adding more salt to a meal.

Tips for eating less salt

- Eat meals without adding extra salt. Start by using less salt in cooking. Taste your food before adding salt at the table.
- Reduce the salt you use gradually - this will help you get used to the flavour.
- To add flavour to meals, use garlic, onion, chilli, lemon juice, vinegar, pepper, herbs, curry paste and spices instead of adding salt and bought sauces.
- Swap salty snacks like pretzels, crackers salted nuts and potato chips for unsalted nuts, low salt crackers, fruit or low fat yoghurt.
- Limit take-away foods. Ask for no salt if you buy fish and chips or other takeaway foods which usually have extra salt added.
- Cut back on the amount of pre-packaged sauces, condiments and dehydrated foods such as seasoning mixes, stocks and soups and noodles that you use.
- Reduce your intake of processed meats, such as bacon, sausages, luncheon and salami.
- Choose fish canned in spring water rather than fish canned in brine.
- Eat more fresh fruit and vegetables
- Cook food, especially vegetables, in minimal water or in the microwave as it helps to keep the flavour so extra salt is not needed.

Salsa your way to less salt

- A salsa is simply a sauce or topping for meat, chicken, fish, pasta, noodles, salad or bread. Try the following salsa ideas to add a real flavour boost to your meals. Simply chop ingredients finely and mix.
- Thai: fresh coriander, sweet chilli sauce, and crushed peanuts.
- Italian: fresh basil, fresh tomato, onion, pepper, balsamic vinegar and extra virgin olive oil.
- Spanish: crushed garlic, chopped fresh tomato, Spanish onion, parsley.
- Mexican: avocado, fresh tomato, red capsicum and chilli paste.
- Chinese: shallot, crushed garlic, onion, crushed ginger, sesame oil and a dash of salt-reduced soy sauce.
- Indian: cucumber, low fat natural yoghurt, mint, mango chutney and curry powder or paste.

Iodised Salt

New Zealand has low levels of iodine in the soil which makes it difficult to get enough iodine in our diet. Make sure the little salt you use make is iodised.

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