

Reduce your salt intake



South Africa has one of the highest rates of hypertension in the world. 6.3 million South Africans are living with high blood pressure. There are 130 heart attacks and 240 strokes daily in South Africa. And 80% of these can be prevented. New research conducted by the World Health Organisation (WHO) has concluded that “South Africa has the highest rate of uncontrolled hypertension in human history”.

Hypertension is the leading risk factor for heart disease. One of the leading causes of high blood pressure is lifestyle, particularly high dietary sodium intake. A diet high in salt is also associated with gastric cancer, osteoporosis, increased asthma severity, and obesity.

So, what is salt safe?

First, choose products which have ‘low salt’ or ‘low sodium’ clearly stated on the label. Then, check the ingredients list: if salt is listed within the first few ingredients then it is a high salt food.

Check the nutrition information table for ‘salt’ or ‘sodium’. Avoid any foods which have more than 1.5g per 100g of salt or more than 600mg of sodium per 100g. These are high salt foods.

Finally, it is important not to add salt to foods at the table. Begin by adding a little less salt to each meal and reduce as your taste adjusts.

Keep an eye out for the Heart and Stroke Foundation’s Heart Mark which alerts you to products which are lower in salt.

Foods high in salt

There are certain foods to be aware of because

they may have very high salt content:

- Bread.
- Margarine.
- Butter spreads.
- Stock cubes.
- Breakfast cereals.

Reverse the salt effect

Here are some general tips for reducing your overall salt intake:

- **Make it a habit.** Learn not to add salt to your food and enjoy the flavour of food.
- **Make it fresh.** Choose fresh fruit and vegetables over packaged foods.
- **Make it flavourful.** Add fresh herbs and spices to your food to boost the flavour instead of salt.
- **Make it better.** When you eat out, choose restaurants over fast food outlets. Ask the kitchen staff to use less salt in your food.

Reducing your salt by a small amount can reduce your risk of heart attack and stroke by 20% or more.

**Information supplied by the Heart and Stroke Foundation of South Africa.*