

Shaking off the salt for a healthier heart

June 29 2018, by Cahli Samata

Most of us know eating too much salt is bad for our bodies. But we may be unknowingly eating far more than we realise. How can we avoid all of this out-of-sight sodium?

When you're planning a meal that's good for your health, what sorts of things do you think about?

The calorie count? Vegetable content? No saturated fats? Sugar-free?

There are so many things to think about that [salt](#) rarely crosses our minds.

But salt can have a huge impact on our long-term health. And we might be eating far more of it than we realise.

Salty as the sea

One of the reasons we may not think about salt is because it's unlikely anyone is pouring half a shaker's worth of salt into their spag bol. In fact, the salt shaker may be the least of our worries.

When we're cooking, we might only season with a pinch of salt or maybe not add any at all. But what we don't see is the salt concealed in the sauces and condiments we use.

[Cooking sauces, salad dressings, dips, crackers and processed meats](#) can all be chock-full of salt. The [Heart Foundation](#) found that some of the

crackers and dips on supermarket shelves were even [saltier than seawater](#)

[Ready-meals are some of the worst offenders](#). Some contain an entire day's maximum salt intake in just one serve!

Even healthy foods contain a little bit of salt. Foods that are part of a healthy diet like bread, cheese, lean meat and even fruit and veg contain a little bit of salt. So we don't really need to add any more salt to our [food](#).

But since many of us have been unknowingly consuming huge quantities of salt through processed foods, it can be a hard habit to kick. When you're used to eating such salty foods on a daily basis, your palate can [become accustomed to it](#). Things may taste wrong when you first try to cut down.

If you wean off gradually, you can [train your taste buds](#) not to miss the salty stuff. And if you do, your [heart](#) might thank you in the long run.

Hearts under a-salt

When I was younger, because of my potato chip addiction, I used to joke that I would eventually die of a salt-induced heart attack.

The older I get, the less funny that joke becomes. It's starting to feel a little too real.

Those tasty crispy discs really might be the key to my demise, with [more and more research](#) linking heart failure to excessive salt consumption. Even the World Health Organization is [recommending we cut back](#).

And it doesn't just hurt your heart. Excessive salt consumption can cause

damage to the kidneys and the arteries leading to the brain, and it can put you at a higher risk of developing stomach cancer.

But what can we do when salt seems to be in *everything*?

Read the label

Just by being aware of the amount of salt you're eating, you can start to make more health-conscious decisions.

When you're in the supermarket, take a look at the nutritional information panel on the products you're buying.

If you want to know how much salt's in the product, look at the sodium. It's best to look at the amount of sodium per 100g to ensure all food is being compared the same.

With sodium, you want to see less than 120mg per 100g. Between 120mg and 400mg is OK sometimes, but if it's more than 400mg, you should steer clear.

Once you get in the habit of reading labels, you'll naturally start making better—and less salty—choices.

Start from scratch

Of course, you can't omit salt from your diet entirely, and you wouldn't want to. [Your body needs some salt to function.](#)

But you can cut down by reducing the amount of processed food you eat. Making your own sauces, dips and meals from scratch is going to drastically reduce the amount of salt in them.

"That's too much work!" I hear you cry. Never fear. [LiveLighter](#) helped me [put together some quick and healthy cooking tips](#) earlier this year.

You can find [more information](#), as well as [healthy recipe substitutes](#), on the [LiveLighter website](#).

Salt aside, reading labels, avoiding processed foods and cooking from scratch are going to improve your health in so many ways.

And it would be nice not to go out on a salt-induced heart attack as well!

This article first appeared on [Particle](#), a science news website based at Scitech, Perth, Australia. Read the [original article](#).

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