

In May 2003, the Government issued new advice on the amount of salt in our diets. Most of us eat too much salt so lowering our salt intake would be better for our health.

The British Beer and Pub Association and the British Hospitality Association have produced this leaflet as part of a Food Standards Agency initiative to raise awareness of the health issues associated with too much salt in our diets, and to provide some practical advice to caterers on what they can do to contribute to lowering salt in the national diet.

## Further information

### FSA Publications

- Healthy Eating Salt (FSA/0357/11202)
- Balance of Good Health (FSA/0008/0802)  
From Eclogistics on 0845 606 0667.
- Catering for Health  
(available from The Stationery Office 0870 600 5533, cost £5)  
FSA Scotland and FSA Wales have commissioned Scottish and Welsh versions of Catering for Health. These are available from Eclogistics on 0845 606 0667.

### Websites:

- [www.foodstandards.gov.uk](http://www.foodstandards.gov.uk)
- [www.beerandpub.com](http://www.beerandpub.com)
- [www.bha.org.uk](http://www.bha.org.uk)

This leaflet can be downloaded from BBPA/BHA websites:

- [www.bha.org.uk](http://www.bha.org.uk)
- [www.beerandpub.com](http://www.beerandpub.com)

Further printed copies are available from:

- British Hospitality Association  
Queen's House, 55-56 Lincoln's Inn Fields  
London WC2A 3BH



# Thinking about

# Salt





## Salt and health

Salt is made up of sodium and chloride, which help to balance the level of fluids in the body. Chloride also helps us to digest our food. However, the sodium contained in salt can lead to high blood pressure (hypertension) if too much is eaten. High blood pressure increases the risk of heart disease and strokes.

We all require a little salt in our diet to function properly but much less than we actually eat nowadays. On average, people are currently eating around 9.5 grams of salt per day. This contains approximately 3.7 grams of sodium. Processed or convenience foods which just require heating will tend to contain higher levels of salt and account for about 75% of the salt in our diets. Small amounts of salt are also naturally found in some foods, and salt is sometimes also added in cooking.

The new Government advice is that people should eat no more than 6 grams per day for adults (i.e. approximately 2.5 grams of sodium), with lower levels for children. These range from less than 1 gram per day for children under 6 months old to 5 grams per day for children between 7 –10 years old.



## What caterers should know

### What is 'too much' salt?

Packaging and cartons are required by law to be labelled for sodium content. As a general rule of thumb:

**0.5 grams of sodium or more per 100 grams is 'a lot'**  
**0.1 grams of sodium or less per 100 grams is 'a little'**

Processed foods eg. tinned/packet soups and ready-prepared meals can contain high levels of salt. The Food Standards Agency is encouraging manufacturers to reduce salt levels in the following key food items in particular:

**Bread**    **Ready meals**  
**Cereals**   **Soups and sauces**



## What caterers can do

### Read the food/product label

Where products are bought at cash and carries or wholesale, read the labels on packaging, and consider buying lower salt product alternatives. As a number of manufacturers are working to reduce salt content in many of their products, it should become easier in the future to find lower salt products. Caterers will be able to pass on the reductions made by manufacturers in the key food items above to customers.

### Talk to suppliers

Catering suppliers may have alternative lines available of the same or similar products with different salt contents. Larger restaurants, pubs and hotel businesses can consider discussing product specifications with suppliers with a view to reviewing salt levels. Special consideration of children's menus, for example, could form part of this exercise as the recommended amounts of salt for children are lower than those for adults.

### Dialogue with customers

If catering businesses receive requests from customers for lower salt foods, they should let their suppliers know. In some cases, nutrient specifications for foods supplied may have been set as part of the initial contract. Where this is not already in place contract caterers can liaise with local authorities, hospital trusts, NHS Boards and the prison service to agree specifications for the meals they supply to schools, hospitals and prisons.

### Food preparation and cooking

Add little or no salt during the preparation and cooking stages. Customers will always be able to add salt for themselves. Gradually reduce the salt you use which will allow your customers' taste buds to be come accustomed to the lower salt options.

Consider the use of herbs, spices and lemon and lime juice to complement and improve the flavour of food when reducing salt content.

Gradual reduction cooking methods affect the amount of salt in the final dish. So, sauces should be reduced first and then seasoned.

### Location of foods in the canteen

Consider the placement of foods that are high in salt such as crisps and salty snacks so that customers are less likely to opt for these options on impulse, e.g. by moving them further away from the cash desk or placing the lower salt options with clear labelling and pricing. Encourage lower salt options through point of sale promotions.

### Menu choice

People go out for a meal for a treat and to enjoy themselves. Providing a varied menu will allow customers greater flexibility to decide for themselves.

