

Food Labels and Salt

By reading the food label, you can see if a food product is low, medium or high in salt. Sometimes food labels may list salt as sodium. This is because salt is made of sodium and chloride. The following may be useful when interpreting the nutritional information on a food label for salt and sodium.

| | Amount of Salt per 100g | Frequency of Consumption |
|--------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Low | 0.25g or less per 100g | Eat plenty of these |
| Medium | 0.25g – 1.25g per 100g | Eat small amounts occasionally |
| High | 1.25g or more per 100g | Avoid these completely |

| | Amount of Sodium per 100g | Frequency of Consumption |
|--------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Low | 0.1g or less per 100g | Eat plenty of these |
| Medium | 0.1g – 0.5g per 100g | Eat small amounts occasionally |
| High | 0.5g or more per 100g | Avoid these completely |

Reference: Blood Pressure Association (UK), 2009

Although this leaflet focuses on salt and sodium, you must also be careful to check the amount of fat and sugar on food labels.

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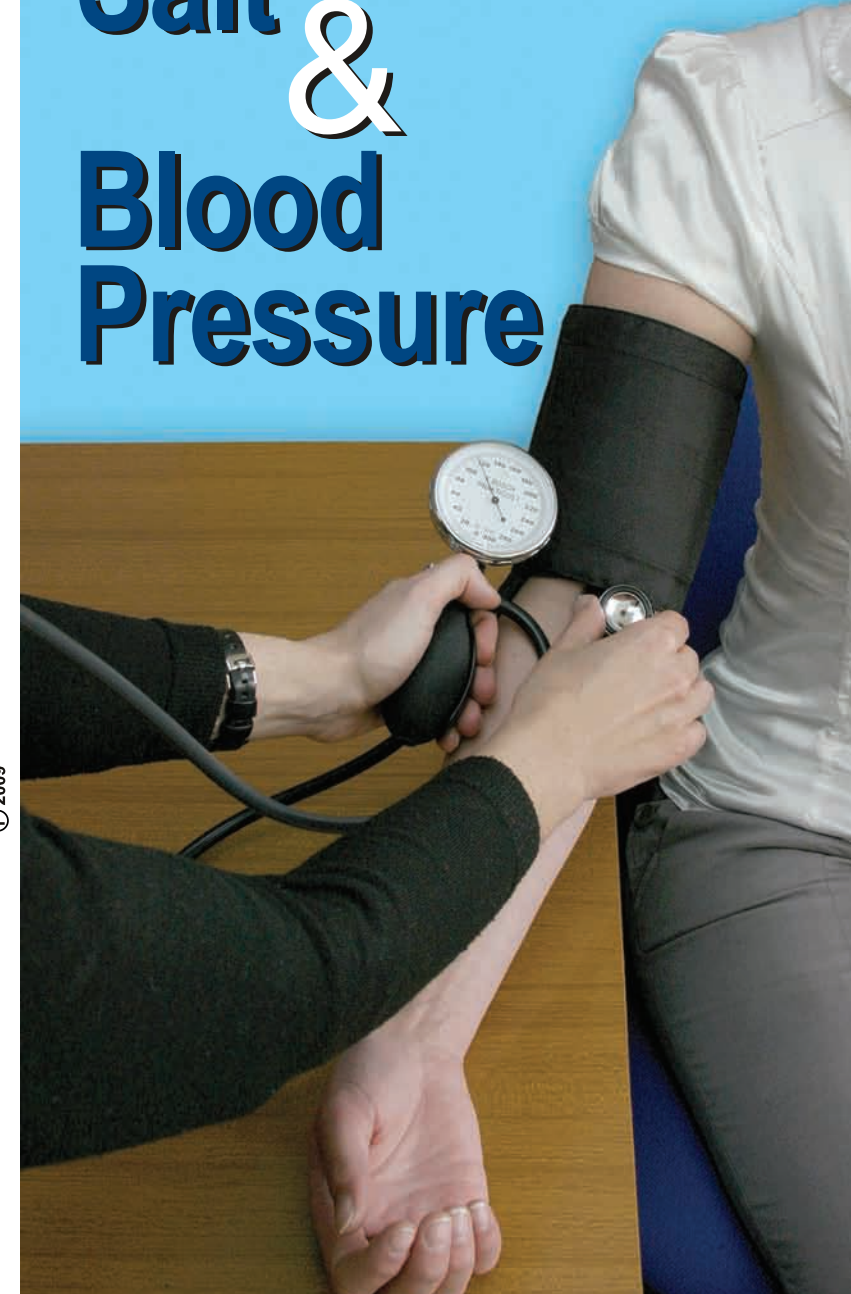


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Food, Salt & Blood Pressure

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Food, Salt and Blood Pressure

Blood pressure is the force of blood pressing against the walls of the arteries, as the heart pumps blood around the body.

The heart beats by contracting and relaxing. The pressure of blood is higher when the heart contracts and lower during the heart's relaxation. It is because of this that two measurements are taken when a doctor or a nurse takes your blood pressure. These two measurements are known as:

Systolic pressure – the pressure exerted when the heart contracts and is forced around the body

Diastolic pressure – the pressure when the heart is relaxed

The above is usually written as, for example,

120 mmHg (Systolic)
80 (Diastolic),

ex: usually said as '120 over 80 millimeters Mercury'.

Although there is no fixed threshold between normal and high blood pressure, generally a pressure below 130/85 mmHg would be considered normal.

High Blood Pressure

High blood pressure (also known as hypertension) is a common condition on the Maltese Islands. People with high blood pressure are three times more likely to develop heart disease or have a stroke than people with normal blood pressure. If not treated, high blood pressure can lead to kidney failure and eye damage.

Causes of High Blood Pressure

Eating too much salt can raise your blood pressure. But there are other things that may increase the risk of developing high blood pressure. These are:

- ▶ Certain diseases eg. thyroid disease and kidney disease;
- ▶ Being overweight;
- ▶ Not being physically active;
- ▶ Drinking too much alcohol.

Some individuals may need to take medicines to control their blood pressure. Remember not to start or stop such medication without consulting your doctor first!

High Blood Pressure and Salt

Eating less salt will have an immediate effect on lowering your blood pressure and reducing the risk of heart disease and stroke. According to the World Action on Salt and Health (WASH), reducing your salt intake by around 2.5g a day can reduce your risk of having a stroke or a heart attack by a quarter.

Adults should eat no more than 5g of salt a day and children should eat much less!

Most of the salt we eat is hidden in processed foods such as ready-made meals or takeaways whereas the rest of the salt is added during cooking or else at table.

In order to lower your salt intake, you may check the following table to get to know which foods are low or high in salt.

Foods that are often high in salt. You should cut down on these foods.

- Breaded chicken or fish (eg. *chicken nuggets*)
- Pickles
- Soy sauce
- Savoury snacks (eg. *potato snacks*)
- Prawns
- Stock cubes and bouillon
- Gravy granules
- Salami
- Yeast extract (eg. *marmite*)
- Cheese
- Anchovies
- Ham
- Salted nuts
- Bacon
- Noodle snack pots
- Salt fish
- Chips (if salt is added)
- Olives
- Smoked meat & fish

Foods where you might need to check their labels as they could be high in salt

- Baked beans
- Cooking sauces
- Ready made meals
- Biscuits
- Crisps
- Soup
- Burgers
- Filled pasta
- Sandwiches
- Breakfast cereals
- Ready made sauces
- Sausages
- Bread and bread products
- Pizza
- Tinned foods
- Cakes and pastries
- Potato croquettes
- Tomato ketchup

Foods that are lower in salt. You should eat more of these foods.

- Breakfast cereals (*with no added salt*)
- Fruit and vegetables
- Porridge oats
- Couscous
- Homemade bread (*with no added salt*)
- Pulses (eg. *peas, beans and lentils*)
- Eggs
- Homemade sauces (*with no salt*)
- Seeds
- Pasta and rice
- Low salt cheese (eg. *mozzarella and emmental*)
- Unsalted nuts
- Fresh fish
- Yoghurt
- Fresh meat and poultry
- Plain cottage cheese
- Plain popcorn
- Fromage frais