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Cut salt by a teaspoon a day to save yourself from a stroke, experts say

By [Jenny Hope](#)

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Cutting down salt by just one teaspoon a day could dramatically reduce the chances of having a stroke, experts have revealed

Cutting the amount of salt you eat by one teaspoon a day could save you from a stroke, warn experts.

Eating less salt reduces the risk of stroke by almost a quarter and the chances of heart disease by 17 per cent,

according to a new review of research studies.

On average, Britons eat almost 10g of salt a day, despite the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommendation being 5g - or one teaspoon.

Much of the salt is 'hidden' in processed and packet foods, with many people being unaware of their own intake.

Although the link between salt consumption and high blood pressure is well-established, researchers from the UK and Italy carried out a review of 13 studies to quantify the effect on health.

Professor Francesco Cappuccio from the University of Warwick, who carried out the research, said 'It's a small step but it's significant in removing any doubt about the need to lower salt intake.'

'We're talking about four or five bags of crisps a day and if you consider changing your diet by having reduced salt bread and reduced salt pasta sauce, you can add up to more than a 5g reduction.'

Professor Cappuccio said convincing the food industry to lower salt levels was a 'slow process', with targets for lowering salt intake not likely to be met before 2024.

The review involving more than 170,000 people found a direct link between salt and the risk of stroke or heart disease.

All the studies were carried out between 1996 and 2008 and involved more than 10,000 'vascular events' such as heart attacks or strokes.

The overall review, published online in the British Medical Journal (BMJ), found that people who regularly consumed 5g of salt a day too much had a 23 per cent greater risk of stroke.

They also had a 17 per cent greater chance of developing heart disease.

The researchers wrote 'The habitual salt intake in most Western countries is close to 10g a day (and much higher in many Eastern European and Asian countries), and we calculated that the average difference between higher and lower salt intake across the study cohorts included in our meta-analysis was 5g a day.

'A reduction of 5g (about one teaspoon) of salt would bring consumption close to the WHO recommended level.'

The review estimates reducing salt intake across the board could prevent one and a quarter million deaths from stroke and almost three million deaths from cardiovascular disease each year in Western countries.

These figures on lives saved could also be an underestimate, it says.

According to the Food Standards Agency (FSA) in the UK, 26 million Britons eat too much salt every day, way above its own recommendation of 6g daily.

Joanne Murphy, Research Liaison Officer at The Stroke Association said 'This study confirms the strong link between salt intake and the risk of stroke.

'Eating too much salt on a regular basis can lead to high blood pressure, which is the single biggest risk factor for stroke.

'Over 40 per cent of strokes could be prevented if people with high blood pressure reduced it through treatment and cutting down on their salt intake.

'The Stroke Association is calling for consistent labelling on food packaging so people are more aware of how much salt already exists in the food that they are buying.'

Professor Graham MacGregor, chairman of Consensus Action on Salt and Health said 'Blood pressure is the biggest cause of death in the world through the strokes and heart attacks it causes. Salt slowly puts up our blood pressure and as this important study clearly demonstrates, is directly responsible for many thousands of strokes, heart attacks and heart failure deaths each year in the UK and the world.

'The public health benefits of reducing salt have long been known, and the UK are leading the way in salt reduction, however it is vital that manufacturers and caterers continue to reduce the amount of salt they add to food if we are to save the maximum number of lives.

'The targeted reduction in the UK was 3.5g salt/day from 9.5g to the current UK maximum target for salt of 6g, however this study clearly demonstrates that a greater reduction in salt intake would have a much greater benefit.'

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