

Reducing salt; preventing stroke



What is a stroke?

A stroke occurs when part of the blood supply to the brain is cut off, reducing the amount of **oxygen** that can get to the brain.

The effect of stroke can therefore be very sudden and serious. There are two main types of stroke; 1) a blockage in a blood vessel, called an **ischemic stroke**; 2) a bleed due to blood vessels bursting, called a **haemorrhagic stroke**.

What causes a stroke?

High blood pressure (hypertension) is the single biggest cause of stroke, responsible for about half of ischemic strokes. A **high salt diet** increases your blood pressure and will therefore increase your risk of stroke.

How common is stroke?

You are not alone if you have had a stroke. Stroke is the third most common cause of death in the UK, with an estimated **150,000 strokes and mini strokes every year**; about a third of which are fatal.

Simple lifestyle changes such as **reducing the amount of salt** in your diet can help to reduce blood pressure and therefore lower your risk of stroke.

Who is at risk of stroke?

Anyone can have a stroke; however there are a number of factors which can increase your risk.

- If you are male
- Over 55 years of age
- Have a family history of stroke
- Are of Asian or African descent
- Have high blood pressure



Also, if you have a diet which is **high in salt or fat, low in fruit and vegetables** or if you **smoke** or are **overweight**, then your risk of having a stroke is higher.

Preventing a stroke

Good news! You can still reduce your risk of having a stroke or second stroke by making simple lifestyle changes, such as:

- Improve your diet, e.g. by eating **less salt**
- **Lose weight**
- Do more **exercise**
- **Quit smoking**

Reduce your intake of **high salt foods**, particularly processed foods which contain a lot of hidden salt. Our average salt intake is 8.6g per day; much higher than the recommended maximum of **6g per day** – about a teaspoon!



Eating more **fruit and vegetables** will increase your intake of potassium – this helps to counteract the effect that salt has on increasing blood pressure.



Top tips

- Sodium is only a part of salt. If you find sodium on a label you will need to **multiply the figure by 2.5** to get salt
- Most of the salt you eat (75%) is hidden in processed foods. **Check labels** of products such as bread, cereal, soup, sauces and meat products and choose lower salt options
- **Don't add salt** when cooking or at the table; foods may taste bland at first it will only take a couple of weeks for you to adjust – sea and rock salts are just as bad for you!
- Adults should be **active** for 30 minutes five times a week; try getting off the bus or train stop earlier and walking into work
- Have regular blood pressure checks to monitor your progress