

Reducing salt : preventing stroke / CASH, the Stroke Association.

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Reducing salt; preventing stroke



What is a stroke?

A stroke usually occurs when the blood supply to part of the brain is cut off, reducing the flow of oxygen to the brain, causing cells to die. There are two main types of stroke; 1) **ischemic strokes**, when a blood vessel becomes blocked, and 2) **haemorrhagic strokes**, when a blood vessel bursts and bleeds into the brain.

Stroke can cause long term disabilities such as paralysis or muscle weakness, loss of speech and emotional problems.

An important warning sign that you might be at risk of having a stroke is a mini stroke or transient ischemic attack (TIA).

How common is stroke?

Stroke is the third most common cause of death in the UK and a leading cause of disability. There are an estimated **150 000 strokes and mini strokes every year**, a third of which are fatal.

What causes a stroke?

High blood pressure (hypertension) is the single biggest cause of stroke, responsible for more than half of all strokes. A **high salt diet** puts up your blood pressure and will therefore raise your risk of stroke.

Who is at risk of stroke?

Anyone can have a stroke, however your risk of stroke is higher 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
- Have had a stroke or mini stroke



Lifestyle factors can also put you at a higher risk of suffering a stroke, such as a diet which is **high in salt or fat**, **low in fruit and vegetables** or if you **smoke** or are **overweight**.



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Preventing a stroke

Good news! Simple lifestyle changes such as **reducing the amount of salt** in your diet can help to lower blood pressure and therefore your risk of stroke. You can reduce your risk if you:

- Eat less salt and fat
- Eat more fruit and vegetables
- 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

- Know your blood pressure: have regular blood pressure checks
- Most of the salt you eat (75%) is hidden in processed foods. **Check the labels** of products such as bread, cereal, soup, sauces and meat products and choose the lower salt options
- **Don't add salt** when cooking or at the table; foods may taste bland at first but it will only take a couple of weeks for you to adjust – sea and rock salts are just as bad for you!
- Eat more fruit and vegetables, aim for at least 5 portions a day
- Adults should be active for 30 minutes five times a week; try getting off the bus or train stop earlier and walking into work

