

# Reducing salt; preventing stroke



## What is a stroke?

A stroke occurs when part of the blood supply to the brain is cut off, stopping the flow of essential nutrients and oxygen to the brain.

The effect of a stroke can therefore be very sudden and serious. There are two main types of stroke; 1) a blockage in a blood vessel, called an **ischaemic 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 around half of ischaemic 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 fourth most common cause of death in the UK, with **more than 100,000 strokes every year**; around one stroke every five minutes.

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
- If you are from a more deprived area



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 alcohol intake**

Reduce your intake of high salt foods, particularly **processed foods** which contain a lot of **hidden salt**. Our average salt intake is 8g per day; much higher than the **recommended maximum of 6g per day** – about a teaspoon!



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



## Top tips

- 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 salt, rock salt, Himalayan salt - **all salt is salt!** Try adding flavours such as lemon, chilli and garlic to food instead
- 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