

SHAKING YOUR SALT HABIT

You know you should stop adding salt to your food—or at least reduce your intake—but what are the alternatives?

salt requirement

Salt intake has increased over time and is excessive in Western societies, far above physiological requirements. Health authorities generally recommend we consume no more than six grams of salt daily (2400 mg sodium), and even less (1600 mg sodium) for those who are overweight or have high blood pressure, diabetes and kidney disease.

But apart from basing your meals on fresh foods (especially potassium-rich plant foods) and choosing low-salt processed foods, why not also replace what's in your salt shaker?

salt replacements

Nature has provided numerous ways to flavour your food without salt. Here are four salt-free flavour enhancers you can use instead.

- ▶ Lemon juice is perfect for finishing salads, soups and stews. For example, it's amazing how a squeeze of lemon juice can lift a simple lentil soup to new heights.
- ▶ Fresh and dried herbs. Use these liberally in your cooking and before serving food. Dried oregano sprinkled on a mixed salad not only adds flavour but significantly boosts the antioxidant content.

- ▶ Dulse granules or blended seaweed flakes. Dried seaweed is a novel way to boost flavour in food while also adding iodine and other minerals like iron and calcium. While it isn't part of the typical Western diet, it has been used by Asian cultures for centuries. A strip of kombu added to broths and stews also makes them taste more "meaty," because it boosts the umami flavour (the fifth taste after sweet, sour, bitter and salty).
- ▶ Nutritional yeast seasoning is dairy free and adds a cheesy flavour. It dissolves well in pasta sauces, soups and casseroles. Buy it as flakes or powder from health food shops. It isn't the same as brewer's yeast or baker's yeast, both of which taste bitter.

tastebud recovery

Don't expect miracles with your tastebuds overnight. It takes four weeks to get used to a lower salt diet. But your sense of taste *will* recover, making it possible for you to detect and enjoy natural and subtle flavours in food. If you find going cold turkey difficult, try cutting back on the amount of salt you use gradually. If you're taking fluid tablets (diuretics), advise your doctor before drastically slashing the salt. ↩