



Sodium Reduction Counselling Guide



Saving Lives through Promotion of Lower Salt Consumption

This is a short guide to help Nurses/Counsellors at the primary health care centres to provide counselling for salt reduction to patients with hypertension. This guide also provides notes and model scripts that may be used by the nurses/counsellors to counsel patients to reduce salt in their diet. The nurse/counsellors should use the patient education handouts for salt reduction during counselling and provide the copy of handouts to the patients.

How can excess salt be harmful?



Excess salt causes high blood pressure



In India, 1 in 4 adults have high blood pressure, which causes heart attack, stroke and kidney disease

Recommended intake vs. current consumption



<5g/day

A healthy adult should consume less than 5g salt/day (< 1 levelled teaspoon)



On an average, people in India consume twice (approximately 11g/day) the recommended amount of salt

Ways to maintain healthy blood pressure and prevent heart attack and stroke



Eating a healthy and low salt diet



Maintain a normal body weight



Avoid smoking and drinking alcohol



Regular exercise



Taking medication as directed

Nurses as equal partners in salt reduction

Nurses can help:

- Create awareness about harmful health effects of excessive salt intake
- Educate patients on ways to reduce salt consumption using various tools and practical tips
- Identify the salt reduction approaches that will work best for patients and their families
- Suggest appropriate dietary change(s) for patients and assist with follow-up

Facts about salt reduction

- Most salt comes from foods prepared at home that are moderately salted. These are the foods we regularly consume in large amounts such as rice, roti, sambar, rasam and curries
- Most people who reduce salt gradually and consistently over time stick with those changes, compared to people who try to cut back by a significant amount all at once
- Cutting salt in recipes by up to 25% (one fourth) does not change taste significantly and can go unnoticed by the consumer

Introduce yourself and Build Rapport

How to read the boxes



Notes for the
Nurses / Counsellor



Example script for
Nurses / Counsellor



Greetings (Namaste). My name is _____. I am here to help you understand how excess salt consumption affects the body and what is the correct amount of salt that we should eat. I will ask you some questions so that we can together identify the best ways to gradually cut down your salt intake, so that you and your family can enjoy healthier food without compromising on the taste and better manage blood pressure.

Ask the patient

Use these questions as a guide to understand patient's practices related to salt. You do not need to record the patient's responses. Use this information to provide specific tips. You may start with asking these questions on salt intake by patients.

In your home-cooked food, is salt added to plain rice, chapati/poori dough, idli/dosa batter?

When eating your meals,

- How frequently do you sprinkle salt on food?
- How frequently do you eat pickle, chutney, papad, etc.?

When snacking or eating out,

- How often do you eat processed foods such as - murukku, namkeen mixture, banana chips/potato chips, biscuits?
- How often do you eat meals prepared outside the home?

Brief Advice

What have you heard about the effects of high salt intake on the body?

After listening to the response, read out the information not mentioned by the patient and correct any misconception the patient has.



Dangers of excess salt consumption



Explain the dangers of eating excess salt.



Do you know that high salt intake can be harmful to the body?

When we eat excess salt, our body will hold extra water, which raises blood pressure. The higher our blood pressure, the greater the strain on our heart, arteries, kidneys and brain. Excess salt intake leads to heart attack, stroke, kidney disease and dementia.

Do you have any questions about how salt affects the body?



Most people think they eat right amount of salt even while consuming excess salt. Therefore, it is essential to explain that research has shown Indians consumes twice the amount of salt.

On an average Indians consume about 11g of salt a day which is about two teaspoons a day while experts recommend we should eat less than 5g a day that is less than a teaspoon a day.

Have you ever given a thought about how much salt is consumed in your family?



After ensuring the patient has understood the dangers of high salt consumption, explain the recommended amount of salt per day.

We should eat less than 5g of salt per day, which is about one levelled teaspoon. Five grams should include all sources i.e the salt added during cooking, added at the table and in accompaniments like pickles, chutneys, or papads, and the salt in packaged food and the snacks or meals we eat outside of our homes.

From what sources do you and your family consume salt?



Myths about salt consumption



Myth: Lowering salt intake may lead to lower than normal blood pressure.

Fact: Eating less salt does not lead to lower than normal blood pressure. Eating less than 5g of salt per day helps to keep it in normal range.



Myth: The body needs more salt during hot seasons or while performing physical labor.

Fact: In rare cases there may be salt loss which may need immediate attention. Physical activity and sweat only removes minimal salt and the body needs more water rather than salt.



Myth: More salt is needed for children to grow well.

Fact: Children should consume less salt than adults, and excess salt is harmful to children. You can help children enjoy the low salt foods and avoid preference for salty food from a young age, which will help prevent high blood pressure in future.

Low salt consumption is good for everyone's health in the family, including those who have normal blood pressure.

Provide patient handouts and explain the tips relevant to the patient.

Here are the handouts that provide easy to adopt/practical tips on how to reduce salt in your daily diet.



Ways to Reduce Salt

WHILE COOKING

These are essential tips to the person who is involved in cooking. It is preferable that counselling is provided to the person responsible for cooking. If the patient or accompanying relative is not the person responsible for cooking food, you may still explain the handout; however, it may not be as effective. Request the patient to bring the person responsible for preparing food for the next counselling session.

Here are some of the tips on how to reduce salt while cooking. The most effective way to reduce salt is by using less salt while preparing food.



Ask the patient “How long does 1 kg salt last in their home?” and suggest to extend the duration of using the same 1 kg salt by another 2 weeks.

If the patient responds as ‘don’t know’, then ask the patient to track next time they buy salt. For counselling, use the example of the six weeks as in the handout.

You may observe the amount of salt consumed by keeping track of the number of days a packet of salt lasts. For example, if one pack lasts for six weeks; try and push it to 8 weeks.

The reduction will not happen immediately. You may try to make it last for an additional five days first and later add another five days and so on.



Notes for the
Nurses / Counsellor



Example script for
Nurses / Counsellor



A large portion of salt in our diet comes from the food that form a significant part of our meals like rice, chapati, poori, paratha. If we avoid adding salt to these foods, then a considerable amount of salt can be reduced without much change in the taste.

One of the best ways to reduce salt is not to add it to rice or dough of chapati/paratha/poori, etc. These are eaten with other foods, such as sambar/dal/subji which have salt. Combining no salt food with salted food is a good idea. For example, chapati with curry; rice with sambar etc.



Research shows that salt can be reduced gradually over time, and our taste buds will get used to decreasing levels of salt.

Slowly and gradually, start reducing the salt added to curries/sambar and other main preparations of the meal. The small reduction is not noticeable. Do it for a week or two and then reduce little more and so on.



It is not feasible to reduce salt in some foods such as chutney, papad, pickles (other local examples). Therefore, recommend to prepare these foods in smaller quantities and less frequently.

Foods such as chutney, papad, pickles, etc. are often high in salt. The more they are prepared, the more likely to be consumed. Therefore, prepare these foods in smaller quantity and less frequently.

E.g. If you make chutney twice a week, make it once a week and try to reduce the quantity as well.

Which one of these tips you would like to start today?



Ways to Reduce Salt

AT THE TABLE

Patients may take a few conscious steps while eating food to avoid extra salt.

Here are some of the tips on how to reduce salt during meals and snack times.



Some foods are high in salt, and high salt is the main characteristic of these foods. It is difficult to reduce salt in these foods. Some examples are chutney, papad, pickles (other local examples).

Since the reduction of salt in these foods is difficult, recommend to eat these foods in smaller quantities and less frequently.

Provide examples from the patient diet of what they can limit.

Food items like chutneys, papads, pickles, etc. are usually high in salt. It is advisable to reduce the quantity and frequency of consumption.

For example, if you have two pieces of pickle at one time, have one. If you eat pickles twice a week, have it once a week.



Notes for the
Nurses / Counsellor



Example script for
Nurses / Counsellor



It is difficult to control the quantity of salt added from salt shakers/finger pinches while eating food. Further, many add salt at the table assuming low salt in the food without tasting.

You should try to avoid adding salt to the foods which are already prepared and served. First taste couple of bites of the food. Add salt only if it is too little.



The packaged/unpackaged processed foods such as murukku, chips, biscuits, etc. are typically consumed as snacks and are generally very high in salt. Therefore, such processed foods should be consumed infrequently.

Foods that are prepared outside home and are consumed as snacks like murukku, chips, biscuits are usually high in salt. Suppose you eat them once in a while, it is okay. But if you consume them frequently, then it is harmful. Limit their consumption to a day in a week or even less frequently. Fresh fruits and salads are healthier alternatives to these snacks.

Which one of these tips you would like to start today?



Ways to Reduce Salt

SHOP SMART

These are essential tips to buy low salt alternatives and avoiding high salt foods while shopping.

I will give you some tips to reduce salt in your diet by making smart choices while shopping



Many instant foods such as noodles, soup premixes (provide examples of available brand names) are high on salt. They use salt/sodium as a preservative and taste enhancer.

One way to shop smart is to know which foods are likely to have high salt and avoid or limit them. Most instant foods such as noodles and soup mixes are usually high in salt.

Second, is to find alternatives to salted foods. For example, unsalted butter can be used instead of salted butter.

Third, buy fresh fruits and vegetables as they are usually low in sodium and contain other nutrients like potassium, vitamins, minerals, fibre, etc.



Notes for the
Nurses / Counsellor



Example script for
Nurses / Counsellor



Regular salt contains sodium chloride. The sodium part of the salt is harmful as it causes high blood pressure and heart disease. Low sodium salts are available in the market that replaces up to 15% of sodium by potassium. These salts taste and look similar to regular salt.

Ask patient whether s/he or a family member have kidney disease other than stones? If patient answers affirmatively, do not recommend low sodium salt.

Low sodium salts can reduce the harmful part of the salt, that is sodium by 15%. When you shop, opt for low sodium salt (provide example). However, potassium salts are not recommended for those with kidney disease.



The packaged/unpackaged processed foods such as namkeens, murukku, banana chips, potato chips, biscuits, ready-to-eat foods, etc., are typically consumed as snacks and are generally very high in salt. Limit purchasing such foods.

If processed foods purchased less often, they are consumed less. So, while shopping, limit the purchase of snacks and savoury foods including ready-to-eat foods like namkeens, murukku, banana chips/potato chips, biscuits, etc.

What's something you will try next time you go shopping?



Ways to Reduce Salt

OUTSIDE HOME (RESTAURANTS, STREET FOOD)

Ask the patient how many times a week is the meal not prepared at home. These could be meals at hostels, restaurants, kiosks, dhabbas, street food, canteen, mess etc. If they eat most of their meals outside, then they have little control over how the food is prepared and have less idea of its salt content. This handout is for those individuals who take atleast one meal a day outside their home.

These are the tips if you eat your meals outside home.



Typically, meals prepared outside home have more salt in the dishes to make them more palatable. Foods that are not freshly prepared are likely to have high salt.

If you go to a regular place for meals then request ahead to prepare your meals with less salt. It is better to consume less salted food than high salted food.



Notes for the
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Example script for
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The ready to eat snacks available outside home like samosa, chats, pakodas, pani puri, etc. are popular snack items and easy meal replacements. These are generally very high in salt and should be avoided.

Avoid regular consumption of foods such as chats, pakodas, pani puri, etc., regularly as they have excessive salt.



Most of the food outlets invariably add food accompaniments such as pickles, ketchup, papads, chat masala in meals or on the table.

Request the restaurant/mess not to provide food accompaniments such as pickles, ketchup, papads, chat masala etc. along with your meals. If you have no control over that, avoid/limit their use in your regular meals.

When you go for outside food, which tip will you try?



Support and Encourage

Work with the patient to identify and commit to a salt reduction approach

I hope after going through these materials, you may have understood that there are many ways to go about salt reduction. It may seem overwhelming to try these new tips all at once. Try choosing one or two new suggestions to try. Most people achieve success when they focus on taking small steps.

What are the one or two things that we have discussed today will you be able to follow?

How confident are you that you could follow these tips?

What would help you to be successful in adopting these tips?



Encourage patients to make their selected dietary change(s) and follow-up with them

Gradually reducing your salt intake will enable a smooth transition to eating less salty food without even realizing it. Many patients are successful when they make small changes.

One by one these new ways of shopping, cooking and eating will become habits and help you to achieve the recommended limit of less than 5g/day of salt.

I look forward to hearing from you, on how you have started including these tips in your lifestyle when you come for your next follow-up visit. You can do it!! All the very best!





