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MailOnline

Salt is GOOD for you: Eating more could even lower the chances of heart disease

By [Mail Foreign Service](#)

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- **Controversial findings question push by authorities to get people to cut consumption**

For years, doctors have been telling us that too much salt is bad for us. Until now. A study claims that cutting down on salt can actually increase the risk of dying from a heart attack or a stroke.

The research has left nutritionists scratching their heads.

Its findings indicate that those who eat the least sodium – about one teaspoon a day – don't show any health advantage over those who eat the most.



© Alamy

In the eight-year study, people with the lowest salt intake had the highest rate of death from heart disease

In fact, those with less salty diets actually had slightly higher death rates from heart disease.

The study, which followed 3,681 healthy European men and women aged 60 or younger, for about eight years, also found that above-average salt intake did not appear to increase the danger of developing high blood pressure.

The report, in the latest issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association, was released just three months after the U.S. government launched a public health campaign urging restaurants and food manufacturers to cut down on their use of

salt.

Sodium was measured in the urine of those taking part, at the beginning and end of the study.

A little more than six per cent of the participants suffered a heart attack, a stroke or some other cardiovascular emergency during the eight years. About a third of these were fatal.

Those who consumed the least salt had a 56 per cent higher risk of death from a heart attack or stroke compared with those who consumed the most.

This was even after obesity, cholesterol levels, smoking, diabetes and other risk factors were taken into account.

There were 50 deaths in the third of participants with the lowest salt consumption, 24 in the third with medium intake and just ten deaths in those with the highest salt levels.

Lead researcher Jan Staessen, head of the hypertension laboratory at the University of Leuven, in Belgium, said: 'Our findings do not support a generalised reduction of salt intake in the population.'

The scientists did not have a firm explanation for their results, but they reportedly speculated that low levels of salt in the body could cause more stress in the nervous system, decrease sensitivity to insulin and affect hormones that control blood pressure and sodium absorption.

But they stressed that those with high blood pressure – who were not included in the study – should still stick to a low-salt diet.

Some experts claimed last night that the findings should be taken with, well, a pinch of salt. They argue that the volunteers used in the study all started out with normal blood pressure, were white, relatively young and reasonably healthy.

Past research has shown that those with hypertension, black people, the elderly and the obese tend to react more negatively to ingesting more salt.

Many other studies have shown salt can be bad for you.

In March, Australian scientists reported that it takes only 30 minutes for a salty meal significantly to impair the arteries' ability to pump blood around the body.

Health experts estimate that cutting average consumption by just a couple of grams a day would slash strokes by 22 per cent and heart attacks by 16 per cent, saving 17,000 lives in the UK.

Research last year suggested heart disease could be cut by almost a fifth if food companies were banned from adding too much salt to their products.

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"salt banning" never happened. (google Tabloidwatch salt) And the problem is not with scientists failing to make up their minds, its with misreporting. This study did NOT look at salt intake, it looked at salt in urine. Low salt in urine might say more about the kidneys being inefficient and unhealthy than anything else. Your body needs salt. But there is strong evidence from multiple studies that excess salt is unhealthy, as this article even admits towards the end.

- Josh, Brighton UK, 06/5/2011 18:57

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It's good for you . . . It's bad for you . . . It is harmful . . . It is not harmful . . . These experts can never make their minds up. I wonder why? Now where shall I dip my celery . . .?

- Bwj, Uk, 05/5/2011 16:31

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There is no doubt that sodium is required in our diet; but to quantify and control the amount ingested is the real problem, which is best done by taking responsibility for the food we consume. It is becoming a huge problem to avoid foods with excess salt and other toxins like GMO, soy and cocktails of additives.

- mike, woking, 05/5/2011 15:59

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From the report: " Lower sodium excretion was associated with higher CVD mortality." The study looked at the amount of sodium excreted, not how much was eaten. As far as I am aware (and I am not an expert) the sodium levels in our bodies are controlled by hormones. Having less or more sodium in your pee may be an indicator of a hormonal imbalance or kidney issues, and it may be that the higher diastolic pressure rates found in this study could be due to the body retaining excess sodium, instead of excreting it. Regardless, I feel the headline is incredibly misleading, as the study did not show (or even look at) the participants salt intake. Just my thoughts.

- Andrew, UK, 05/5/2011 15:07

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- Tallulah, Hove, UK, 05/5/2011 13:43

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