

# Healthy eating

The African Caribbean way

Helping you take control  
of your blood pressure



**Blood Pressure  
Association**

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# Healthy eating - The African Caribbean way

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## Introduction

If you are of African Caribbean descent, then this booklet is written for you.

People of African Caribbean descent are particularly at **high risk of having a stroke**.

**High blood pressure increases your risk of having a stroke or a heart attack.** You can help to reduce this risk, by eating a healthy diet.

This booklet gives you practical information and ideas about how to eat a healthy diet, which will help you to lower your blood pressure.

Traditional African Caribbean dishes can be high in salt, which raises your blood pressure.

People of African Caribbean descent are more sensitive to the effects of salt compared with other ethnic groups. Doctors do not fully understand the reasons for this. So this means that African Caribbean people get more benefit from lowering the amount of salt in their diet.



## What is healthy eating?

A healthy balanced diet contains:

- Starchy foods such as bread, rice, pasta, potatoes, yams and sweet potatoes
- At least five portions of fruit and vegetables daily
- Moderate amounts of dairy products, look for low fat versions where possible
- Low amounts of salt

It is important to eat a healthy diet because it can reduce your risk of developing certain illnesses and serious diseases, for example a stroke or heart attack.

*To cook healthier dishes, try to use less salt and reduce the amount of fat that you use.*



**The following is a list of some popular African Caribbean dishes that may contain too much salt and saturated fats.**

Antigua, Montserrat, Nevis	Fish soup, pepper pot soup
Barbados	Jug-jug black pudding
Belize	Conch fritters, rice and chicken, tamales, refried beans and iswa
Dominica	Tannia, mountain chicken
Grenada	Callaloo, lambi souse
Guyana	Mellagee
Jamaica	Brown george, roasted breadfruit, saltfish and ackee
St. Vincent & the Grenadines	Stewed shark
British Virgin Islands	Saltfish and rice, fish chowder, conch salad
Trinidad and Tobago	Kachouri, palouri, pelau, pakoras
Guadeloupe and Martinique	Pate en pot, mechoui

## Salt

Cutting down on salt can help you to lower your blood pressure in weeks, which lowers your risk of heart disease and stroke.

The more salt you eat, the higher your blood pressure will be. You should limit your salt intake to 6g per day. Targets for children are much lower e.g. children aged four to six should only eat up to 3g of salt per day.

### Tips on how to eat less salt

#### Eat more natural foods

Natural foods contain little or no salt. Choose from:



Low-fat and low-salt dairy produce e.g. natural yoghurt and skimmed milk

Starchy foods like potatoes, cassava, yam, grains, oats and rice



Fruits, vegetables and pulses (fresh, frozen, dried or tinned with no salt)

Fresh fish, plain chicken, lean meat, eggs, unsalted nuts and seeds

#### Eat less processed foods

75% of the salt in our foods is found in processed foods. However many traditional African Caribbean dishes have salt added during preparation or cooking.

Examples of processed foods are:



Bread and sandwiches

Tinned and packet soups

Salted, smoked or tinned fish

Most breakfast cereals



Biscuits, cakes and crackers

Fast foods e.g. chinese and indian takeaways or hamburgers



Ready made meals e.g. pizzas, pasta dishes or curry

Meat products e.g. bacon, sausages or tinned meat

Snacks e.g. crisps or peanuts



Instant foods e.g. noodles

Some brands of baked beans

## Look at food labels when buying foods



Salt has the chemical name **sodium chloride**. Sodium is one part of salt, the other part is chloride.

Sometimes sodium is listed on food labels instead of salt.

**1g sodium = 2.5g salt**

So, if the label lists sodium, to work out the amount of salt from the sodium content you should multiply it by 2.5.

**Low salt** = Less than 0.25g salt (0.1g of sodium) per 100g

**Moderate salt** = Between 0.25g salt (0.1g of sodium) and 1.25g salt (0.5g sodium) per 100g

**High salt** = More than 1.25g salt (0.5g of sodium) per 100g

## **Foods that contain salt:**

Check the label to see if it lists the amount of salt per serving or in the whole pack. You may not be eating the whole pack, so you need to work out how much salt is in the amount of food you are eating.

It is important to **cut down on the amount of salt that you add to your food** when you are cooking.

## **When cooking foods:**

Do not add salt to the cooking water when you cook foods like potatoes, carrots, pasta and rice – otherwise the food will be higher in salt.

## **Avoid using the following high-salt products to flavour foods:**

- Table salt, sea salt, rock salt
- Garlic salt, stock cubes, soy sauce, gravy granules, ready-made mustard, pickles, sauces like ketchup or brown sauce
- Curry powders and some spices **often have added salt** – **check the label**



Try to use alternatives to salt such as;



- Herbs and spices, pepper, chillies
- Ginger, cinammon, lemon juice, vinegar



- Annatto seeds are used to flavor soups, stews, and fish dishes



- Curry powder made from a variety of **freshly home ground spices**



- Pimento, also known as allspice, is used in pickles, marinades, soups, and stews and is an important ingredient in jerking

Jerking is a method of cooking meat and poultry. Meat and chicken, can be marinated in a mixture of scallions, garlic, thyme, onion, and lemon juice, **without having to use salt.**

**Remember -**  
cutting down on salt can help you to lower your blood pressure

## Fruit and vegetables

### Why are fruit and vegetables good for you?

They are a good natural source of potassium, which has the opposite effect to salt and will help to **lower your blood pressure.**

The vitamins, minerals and fibre that fruit and vegetables provide can help to lower your risk of serious health problems like heart disease, stroke and some cancers.

They increase your energy levels, improve your bowel function and enable your body to deal with stress.

Fruit and vegetables are important for everyone – not just adults but children too. Our likes and dislikes of foods are formed in the first few years of life, so it's important to give children lots of fruit and vegetables to try. It will help them develop a taste for them, meaning they will be more likely to eat fruit and vegetables as teenagers and adults.

It is important to eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day.