

## **BfR recommends measures to reduce salt content in food**

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The daily salt intake of Germans is too high. In particular, men, children and adolescents consume particularly high amounts of salt. The addition of salt to food prepared in the home is the lesser evil. Most foods are no longer conceivable without salt as it would seem they only acquire the “right taste” through salt. Especially foods like bread, meat and sausage products, dairy products and non-alcoholic beverages have high levels of salt. But the love of salty food is not hereditary: infants don't like salt. It is only when they reach the age of two or three that children develop a liking for the condiment.

High salt consumption can raise blood pressure and lead to heart disease. Too much salt in food carries the risk of kidney disorders, osteoporosis or stomach cancer. Studies indicate that it is possible to lower blood pressure by cutting back on table salt intake. According to the estimates, fewer consumers would require treatment for high blood pressure or die of a heart attack if they were on a low-salt diet.

On the EU level measures are currently being discussed to reduce the salt levels in foods on health grounds. Against this backdrop the Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) has issued an opinion on the level of salt consumption of consumers and which foods contain particularly high levels of salt. It evaluated the association between blood pressure and salt consumption and whether a lower salt intake reduces the risk of developing high blood pressure. It identified the amounts of salt that can be ingested daily. It also looked at whether the findings can be applied to all consumers.

The result of the assessment is that diet has a major impact on high blood pressure. A low-salt diet reduces blood pressure. Lowering salt intake has a positive effect on all consumers. Elderly and overweight individuals would benefit in particular. No negative effects of reduced salt intake are to be expected. BfR, therefore, recommends reducing the salt levels in processed foods because they make a substantial contribution to elevated salt intake.

In the opinion of BfR it is important to raise consumer awareness about the association between salt consumption and health in order for people to assume more responsibility for themselves. One of the preconditions for this is the improved labelling of foods with nutrition and health information, including details of salt content. An expert meeting is to be held at BfR on 15 October 2009 to make some headway on this subject.

The full version of the BfR Opinion in German is available on [http://www.bfr.bund.de/cm/208/bfr\\_empfiehl\\_t\\_massnahmen\\_zur\\_verringerung\\_des\\_salzgehaltes\\_in\\_lebensmitteln.pdf](http://www.bfr.bund.de/cm/208/bfr_empfiehl_t_massnahmen_zur_verringerung_des_salzgehaltes_in_lebensmitteln.pdf)