

Choose High-Sodium Seasonings Wisely

Salt is an indispensable seasoning in our daily lives as it enhances the natural taste of food and flavours of dishes. Sodium in salt is one of the important electrolytes in the human body. However, excessive intake of sodium may increase the risk of hypertension, stroke and cardiovascular disease. Hence, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends adults to limit their daily intake of sodium to no more than 2,000 mg (slightly less than 1 level teaspoon of salt).

What are high-sodium (high-salt) foods?

According to the Centre for Food Safety, a food is considered as high-sodium when it contains more than 600 mg of sodium per 100 g.

As urban dwellers become increasingly health-conscious, food manufacturers go along with the trend to promote natural sea salt and chicken powder which claim to be healthier than table salt. These products are often more expensive than table salt, but are they really healthier?

Natural Sea Salt

Containing rich mineral content is usually the selling point of natural sea salt. The data from the Centre for Food Safety (Table 1) revealed that the potassium content in natural sea salt is higher than table salt. Yet, both types of salt contain more or less the same amount of other minerals such as sodium, phosphorus and calcium. In fact, we cannot obtain the amount of potassium, phosphorus and calcium that the body needs every day by consuming salt alone. In contrast, we can obtain adequate amount of potassium, phosphorus and calcium easily from vegetables, fruit, meat, fish and dairy products. Therefore, maintaining a balanced diet is the best way to achieve the recommended daily intake of various minerals. As both natural sea salt and table salt contain considerable amount of sodium, we should minimise the amount we use while cooking or seasoning to avoid excessive sodium intake.

Table 1: Comparison between Table Salt and Natural Sea Salt:

	Table Salt ¹ (Per 100 g)	Natural Sea Salt ¹ (Per 100 g)	Recommended Daily Intake for Adults ²
Sodium (mg)	38,758	37,034	No more than 2,000
Potassium (mg)	8	24	3,600
Phosphorus (mg)	0	3	720
Calcium (mg)	24	34	800 to 1,000

Source:

1 Centre for Food Safety

2 “Dietary Reference Intakes for Chinese (2013 edition)” by Chinese Nutrition Society

Chicken Powder

The advertisements of chicken powder are commonplace in the market, leading to the common belief that chicken powder is a healthier substitute for salt. Although the sodium content of chicken powder is lower than salt, chicken powder is still a high-sodium seasoning (18,586 mg of sodium per 100 g of chicken powder). Thus, if we increase the amount of chicken powder used in cooking or seasoning due to its lower sodium content compared with salt, we may end up consuming more sodium. Therefore, we should control the amount of high-sodium seasonings used to avoid excessive intake of sodium in a lapse in attention.

All in all, natural sea salt or chicken powder are both high-sodium seasonings. We should reduce the amount of high-sodium seasonings used in cooking or seasonings as much as possible. Alternatively, we can make good use of natural ingredients like ginger, spring onion, garlic, ground pepper, herbs, coriander and onions when cooking. This makes your dishes healthier by reducing the use of seasonings containing sodium.

To know more about healthy eating, please visit <https://www.chp.gov.hk/en/healthtopics/content/25/8800.html>