

Source: The Straits Times, Page A1
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Drive to cut Singaporeans' sodium intake by 15%

5-year plan to promote use of lower-sodium salt substitutes, sauces and seasonings

Clara Chong

Singaporeans are consuming too much salt and plans are in place to get people to cut their sodium intake by about 15 per cent over the next five years.

To do so, the Health Promotion Board (HPB) will urge Singaporeans to replace their regular salt

with lower-sodium alternatives, which are considered healthier. It will work with retailers to make these substitutes more affordable.

The board will also ensure there is a greater variety of lower-sodium sauces and seasonings in shops and launch a public education campaign. These details of the national strategy to cut sodium consumption were outlined by the board on Wednesday. The strategy was announced during the Budget debate in March.

The diet of Singaporeans has become higher in salt over the years. In 2019, a Singaporean took, on average, 3,600mg of sodium a day, up from about 3,300mg in 2010. The amount is well above the World Health Organisation's recommended daily intake of not more

than 2,000mg or the amount contained in about one teaspoon of salt.

A 15 per cent reduction will see the daily sodium intake of Singaporeans fall to around 3,100mg.

Studies have found that excessive sodium consumption results in high blood pressure, which can lead to heart attacks and strokes.

Sodium makes up 40 per cent of the weight of regular salt, which is sodium chloride. This means 1,000mg of salt has 400mg of sodium.

Using salt substitutes such as potassium chloride, which tastes like regular salt, can help to reduce one's sodium consumption. This has the added benefit of increasing one's potassium intake, which helps to regulate blood pressure.

This is useful as Singaporeans' average potassium intake of about 2,500mg a day is below the recommended 3,500mg to 4,700mg a day, the board said.

However, salt substitutes are

about 10 times more expensive than regular salt. To make these alternatives affordable, the board is working with major retailers to introduce house brand lower-sodium salt by 2023.

For a start, a more affordable lower-sodium salt product will go on sale at supermarket chains Fair-Price and Sheng Siong from the first week of October.

Marketed as K-salt, this lower-sodium salt blend comprises mostly sodium and potassium chloride. This blend reduces sodium content by more than 30 per cent when compared with regular salt. A 400g packet will cost \$2.50.

The board will also increase the range and variety of lower-sodium sauces and seasonings. These healthier sauces and seasonings currently make up 25 per cent of all such products on sale in Singapore and the proportion will be increased, said the board.

In October, it will launch a nation-

wide sodium-reduction campaign that will stretch over several years.

Singapore's war on salt follows its war on sugar, which aims to get Singaporeans to reduce their sugar intake. On Wednesday, Health Minister Ong Ye Kung posted on social media platform TikTok a blind taste test between food cooked with regular salt and lower-sodium alternatives, and he said there was little to no difference between the two.

A recent local study by the National University of Singapore's Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health found that an incremental reduction in sodium intake significantly improves health, even for those with normal blood pressure. High blood pressure is a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease.

Dr Eunice Pang, deputy director of policy and strategy development at the board, said: "Hypertension has risen in Singapore. At the same time, from our National Nutrition Survey, we have seen an increase in sodium intake.

"What we have found is that more than half of the sodium intake comes from salt and 25 per cent from sauces and seasonings. So that is why we are focusing on substituting regular salt with lower-sodium salt first."

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[SEE THE BIG STORY • A 4](#)

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(From left) LPH Catering's general manager Shao Lee, 35; founder Lee Peng Hwa, 64; and operations manager Mark Lee, 33. The firm is one of the catering companies that have switched to low-sodium salt and sauces. ST PHOTO: JASON QUAH

Nearly 150 caterers have already switched to low-sodium salt

Zhakl Abdullah

Almost 150 catering companies here have switched to low-sodium salt and sauces, ahead of a Health Promotion Board (HPB) campaign to cut sodium consumption in Singapore.

The board will be working with eatery chains as well as hawkers to use the healthier alternative in their dishes as part of its efforts to address rising hypertension here.

Studies have shown that an excessive intake of sodium results in high blood pressure, which can lead to heart attacks and strokes.

LPH Catering switched to low-sodium salt and sauces in 2021 under HPB's Healthier Dining Programme, which was started in 2014 to get food and beverage operators to offer healthier options.

Making the switch was "quite a pleasant experience" for the caterer. "We didn't really need to tweak the recipes," said the firm's

general manager, Mr Shao Lee.

His customers also did not notice any change in taste after the switch, he said, as the company did not receive any negative feedback.

Mr Samsudin Saman, a 55-year-old executive whose employer has been using LPH as a caterer for about seven years, said the food tastes almost the same after the caterer switched to the healthier salt.

In a four-week trial last year involving National Transport Workers' Union canteens and food services firm Sodexo, HPB found that 83 per cent of the respondents did not notice any difference in taste between meals prepared with conventional salt and sauces and those made with low-sodium alternatives.

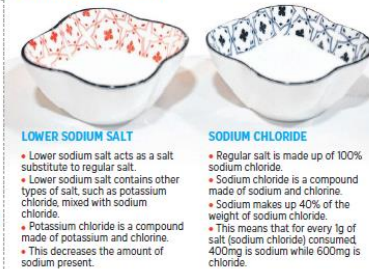
There was also little difference in the cost of making the meals, which each had about 450mg less sodium. Every low-sodium meal cost about 0.1 cent more than a regular version.

Potassium chloride, which tastes the same as regular salt but con-

Less salt, please



SALT VERSUS SODIUM



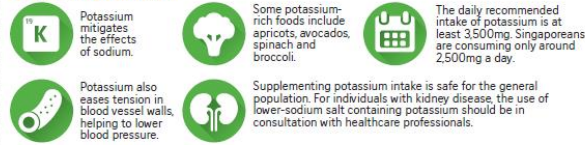
WHAT HAPPENS IF TOO MUCH SODIUM IS CONSUMED?



DOES OUR BODY NEED SODIUM?

Sodium is essential in maintaining certain vital functions, such as a healthy blood pressure and to facilitate the contraction and relaxation of muscles. However, only a small amount of 500mg a day is needed.

HOW POTASSIUM HELPS



- Potassium mitigates the effects of sodium.
- Potassium also eases tension in blood vessel walls, helping to lower blood pressure.
- Some potassium-rich foods include apricots, avocados, spinach and broccoli.
- The daily recommended intake of potassium is at least 3,500mg. Singaporeans are consuming only around 2,500mg a day.
- Supplementing potassium intake is safe for the general population. For individuals with kidney disease, the use of lower-sodium salt containing potassium should be in consultation with healthcare professionals.

Source: HEALTH PROMOTION BOARD ST PHOTO: JASON QUAH STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

tains about 30 per cent less sodium, is usually used as a low-sodium substitute.

Low-sodium salt is safe for consumption, said Dr Jasper Tromp of the National University of Singapore's Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health. Several large-scale studies on salt substitutes found no safety issues, he said.

Mr Samsudin said he has opted for low-sodium salt and sauces in his own kitchen since he was diagnosed

with high blood pressure about 12 years ago.

IMI Lifestyle Products has been selling low-sodium salt for more than two decades. Its managing director, Mr Goh Chiew Seng, said he hopes there will be more demand for such products amid the push to lower sodium consumption.

Low-sodium salt currently makes up just 2 per cent of the market here, said HPB's deputy director of policy and strategy develop-

ment, Dr Eunice Pang.

"We are hoping to aggressively grow this to about at least half the market share in place of (conventional) salt," she said.

In a video on his TikTok account on Wednesday, Health Minister Ong Ye Kung, together with Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Health Rahayu Mahzam, attempted to identify dishes made with regular salt from those made with low-sodium alternatives.

Mr Ong was able to correctly pick out a plate of low-sodium fried mee siam, but he was unable to tell biryani chicken made with low-sodium salt from that made with the normal variety.

While low-sodium alternatives may be more expensive, grants and incentives from HPB would make them more affordable for eateries, he said.

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