# Eating out? How to avoid consuming too much sodium

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Singaporeans consume far too much sodium in their diet.

According to the recently released National Nutrition Survey by the Health Promotion Board (HPB), the average daily intake of the mineral has gone up from 3,480mg in 2019 to 4,000mg in 2025 – double the daily recommended limit.

The survey also found that 95% of respondents exceeded the daily recommended sodium intake limit of 2,000mg, up from 88% in 2019.

This increase has been attributed to more people in Singapore eating out, with seven in 10 reported eating out at least once a day, up from six in 10 in 2019.

They have also been doing so more regularly, with the frequency increasing from six times a week in 2019 to nine times weekly in 2025.

HPB noted that some dishes that have become popular tend to be served in larger portions and are also higher in calories, fat and sodium.

For example, one serving of mala xiang guo, a spicy stir-fried dish, contains about 3,100mg of sodium, while a single serving of tomato hot pot can contain up to 4,900mg of sodium.

Meanwhile, other popular dishes have become saltier in recent years, HPB found. For example, a bowl of prawn noodles now contains about 3,400mg of sodium, up from 2,700mg in 2023.

Is it still possible to enjoy the convenience of eating out while avoiding sodium traps? The Straits Times talks to experts to find out more.




Some dishes that have become popular in recent times tend to be served in larger portions and are higher in calories, fat and sodium. Excessive sodium intake can lead to high blood pressure, a major risk factor for heart disease and stroke.
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## WHAT ARE THE HEALTH RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH CONSUMING TOO MUCH SODIUM?

Ng Teng Fong General Hospital principal dietitian Lim Ruey Jiun said excessive sodium intake can lead to high blood pressure, a major risk factor for heart disease and stroke.

"Over time, a consistently high-sodium diet may also increase the risk of kidney disease and other cardiovascular complications," she said.

Humairah Hameed Maricar, a dietitian with SingHealth Polyclinics, noted that other complications include fluid retention, which can lead to swelling in the hands, feet, ankles and face.

Fluid retention can be particularly problematic for those with existing heart problems, or kidney or liver disease, she said.

"Furthermore, foods high in salt, including processed and preserved foods, are associated with an increased risk of stomach cancer," Humairah said.

"Excess sodium intake may also increase calcium loss through urine, which can gradually reduce bone mineral density and increase the risk of osteoporosis over time," she added.

## WHAT DISHES HAVE THE HIGHEST SODIUM LEVELS?

For some dishes, a single serving would exceed the daily recommended sodium limit.

Citing HPB data, the dietitians said some of the worst offenders are seafood tom yum noodle soup, which contains about 4,400mg of sodium, and laksa yong tau foo, which can contain up to 3,853mg of sodium, particularly if taken with more fried items.

Other high-sodium dishes include curry chicken noodles and mee soto – both of which can contain about 3,700mg of sodium per serving – and beef noodle soup, which has about 3,480mg of sodium.

"Local dishes that tend to be higher in sodium are often those prepared with larger amounts of sauces, gravies, seasonings, processed ingredients or soups," said NTFGH's Lim.

Meanwhile, lower-sodium options are generally those with fewer sauces and processed ingredients, she said.

She pointed to examples such as chicken porridge, which contains 750mg of sodium, or paper thosai, which has just 220mg of sodium.

Other options include sliced fish bee hoon soup with clear broth, which would contribute between 700mg and 1,000mg of sodium if one does not finish the soup, and yong tau foo – with clear soup and no more than six items, limiting processed food, soup and sauce – which contains between 600mg and 1,000mg of sodium, she noted.

Lim cautioned, however, that the sodium content of the same dish can vary significantly depending on the recipe and preparation methods.

## WHAT CAN I DO TO CUT MY SODIUM INTAKE?

SingHealth Polyclinics' Humairah said simple adjustments can help a person reduce sodium intake without compromising on the enjoyment of eating out.

These include asking for less sauce, gravy or sambal, or asking for these to be served on the side to better control the amount consumed, she said.

Lim noted that a single tablespoon of light soya sauce has about 1,000mg of sodium.

"Just two tablespoons of light soya sauce can provide approximately 2,000mg sodium, which is equivalent to the recommended daily sodium limit for adults," she said.

She added that diners can also limit the amount of soup they consume – which can contain a significant amount of sodium – as well as restrict their consumption of processed ingredients such as fish cakes, sausages, luncheon meat or canned food.

"When available, choose outlets that use lower-sodium ingredients," she said.

Humairah added that consumers can also eat more vegetables, such as by ordering an extra vegetable side dish with economy rice.

"Those who eat out regularly may also consider bringing their own vegetables, such as salad greens, tomatoes or cucumbers, to complement their meals," she noted.

"Fresh vegetables are low in sodium and rich in potassium, which helps offset some of the effects of sodium. Incorporating more vegetables into meals is therefore a simple and effective way to support overall health while reducing sodium intake," she said.

Lim noted that while making such adjustments can be difficult at first, people can eventually get used to them.

"Taste preferences can adapt over time, and many people find that after gradually reducing sodium in their diet, they are better able to appreciate the natural flavours of food," she said.

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