

happy Alternatives

We suggest substitutes for all your favourite sins and look at the options on the market

We all have weaknesses: certain flavours that we can't resist and foods that always lead us into temptation. Denying yourself the things you really want can be counterproductive: make them forbidden and you'll want them even more. Instead, learn how to have your cake and eat it, so to speak. Find alternatives and substitutes and you can avoid the bitter taste of denial. Don't expect yourself to live a life of absolute purity but cut down a little on fat, sugar, caffeine, salt and alcohol and the overall effect will be a massive boost to your health.

salt

A magical ingredient that brings maximum flavour out of savoury foods, salt is an essential item in any kitchen. However, too much of the stuff and you're in trouble. Medical experts recommend that a normal adult should consume about 4g of salt a day: that's just under a teaspoonful. This doesn't sound a lot but the average UK adult is taking in nearly 10g of the stuff daily.

It's not salt itself that's potentially dangerous, but the sodium which makes up 40% of it. People with a high sodium intake increase their risk of health problems like high blood pressure, strokes, heart disease and osteoporosis. If you think you're eating too much, it's time to cut down.

Grains of Truth

- The salt you sprinkle on your food at the table is probably not your main source. It's the hidden salt in food that you've got to watch. Ready-meals, tinned vegetables and foods like crisps, processed cheese, bacon, ham and yeast extract tend to have a high salt content - so avoid them. Look on the nutritional information panel for the sodium amount - bearing in mind that

you need to multiply it by 2.5 to find the total salt content.

- The best advice is to eat fresh foods because they contain very little salt. Food which has been processed or preserved in any way is likely to have a much higher sodium content.
- Adding salt at the table and while cooking can add up 2g a day to your intake. Use it with restraint or opt for a low-sodium substitute.
- You can add a tangy, savoury flavour to food without using salt - try a seaweed product, for instance. These mineral-packed condiments enhance food flavours in the same way as salt without the sodium.
- Salt can dehydrate you and lead to water-retention - it is not a dieter's friend!

You could try

LoSalt

Available in all major supermarkets, this contains only one third of the sodium of ordinary salt. LoSalt produce a handy calculator card that you

can keep in your handbag, listing the sodium content of many common foods and meals. For your free calculator, write to LoSalt Calculator, 1 Curfew yard, Thames Street, Windsor, Berkshire SL4 1SN.



100 to give away

We have 100 packs of LoSalt plus a calculator card, to give away. To enter, send a card marked "LoSalt" to us at Slimmer, Castle House, 97 High Street, Colchester CO1 1TH.

SoLo

This low-sodium product is actually made from Icelandic sea salt, reported to have a superior, more natural flavour. It has 60% less sodium than the real stuff but retains other minerals like potassium. It also has the added bonus of dissolving very quickly - great for cooking. Find SoLo in Asda as well as specialist food stores or call 0181 402 6079.

Seagreens

A salt substitute produced from fresh organic wrack. Seagreens Seaweed Table Condiment should enhance flavours in exactly the same way as salt, but without the sodium. Find it in healthfood shops and delicatessens - or call 0171 723 5968 for more details.



Alcohol

BOOZE: it's a potentially lethal addictive drug but it's also an ineradicable part of our social culture. We use it to relax, to unwind, to celebrate, to drown our sorrows and, sometimes, just to relieve our boredom. While alcoholic drinks are pretty fat-free (apart from cream liqueurs!), they do contain a few calories and they're empty ones - not much use to your body. They also thwart your healthy eating plan by dehydrating you, causing bloating and stimulating your appetite. What's to be done? Obviously, drinking to excess is never a good idea but you don't have to give it up. After all, alcohol - and red wine in particular - has health benefits too. There's no reason why you shouldn't add interest to a virtuously low-fat meal with a glass of wine. A 5fl.oz glass contains about 95 calories and is fat-free.