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The saltiest foods in your pantry (and what to eat instead)

As a new report reveals we're eating 40 per cent more salt than we should, we look at the everyday foods teaming with hidden salt



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10 May 2025 9:00am BST

When it comes to added salt, we tend to fixate on how much we're getting from processed food and food eaten outside the home. And rightly so: it

accounts for 75 per cent of the salt in our diet. But something we often let slip are the salt-ridden ingredients we add to home cooked meals.

Serve [stuffing](#) and [gravy](#) with your roast chicken and you're raising [its salt content](#) even before you reach for the salt mill, add soy sauce to your healthy veggie stir fry and suddenly it becomes anything but. In fact the hidden salt in these commonly used store cupboard staples is pushing too many of us over our recommended daily intake of no more than 6g of salt a day.

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According to the British Heart Foundation, adults are eating up to 40 per cent more than the government guidelines; consuming on average 8.4g a day.

Excess salt levels can lead to an increase in [high blood pressure](#), heightening the risk of developing heart and circulatory diseases like heart attacks, heart failure, strokes and vascular dementia

“It is important to remember that the salt we use in our cooking still matters,” says Dominique Ludwig, a nutritionist. “Imagine salt intake as a bucket. You start the day with an empty bucket and think how much salt do you want to fill up that bucket with over the course of the day. Everything counts”

Not all salt is bad though, ss Ludwig explains, “salt is an essential micronutrient, so it isn't that we should be eating a salt free diet but more that we should be more aware of how much we're consuming.”

From gravy granules to tinned soups, here are some of the items to watch out for in your pantry:

Gravy granules



A mainstay of a traditional Sunday roast, reaching for granules for a classic gravy is tempting for a quick flavour hit. But many contain a surprising amount of salt. “You’re looking at around 0.47g a serving with the big brands like Bisto,” Ludwig says. “The salt is added for flavour, it’s not coming from the stock itself. Gravy powders are often ultra-processed too.”

The healthier option

If you’re roasting meat, Ludwig says you’ve already got the basis for a healthier alternative. “Use your meat juices, which will be nice and caramelised,” she explains. “Add water and thicken it up with flour. You could add in a splash of [wine](#), vinegar or lemon juice to add a touch of acidity too.”

Stock cubes



A vital addition to many dishes, but another overlooked source of salt. A classic Oxo Beef Stock Cube, for instance, contains 0.95g of salt per 100ml prepared stock, while their reduced salt option offers 0.66g of salt per 100ml prepared. “Again, the salt in stock cubes is added for flavour, but there are alternatives,” Ludwig explains.

The healthier option

“Choose your cubes carefully and go for a higher quality one with less salt in it. Kallo makes organic, very low salt stock cubes and their beef version contains just 0.1g of salt per 100 ml prepared stock.”

Cereal



It's safe to say that Ludwig isn't a fan of cereal. "We've been conditioned into thinking that it's an amazing breakfast because it's often got added vitamins and is low in fat. In reality, cereal is very high in carbohydrates, low in protein, often low in fibre, but salt can differ from brand to brand." The nutritionist explains that [cornflakes](#) contain some of the higher salt levels, at 0.34g per 30g serving, whereas [Weetabix](#) offered 0.1g per two biscuit serving.

The healthier option

"Instead, if you eat things like rolled [oats in porridge](#), you're naturally going to be eating a salt free breakfast," Ludwig says, "Or it's easy to make your own [granola](#) using oats, nuts and seeds. Having that with Greek yogurt is an amazingly healthy breakfast."

Baked beans



According to Ludwig, beans have many health benefits. “They contain plenty of soluble fibre, they are associated with reduction of chronic diseases and are really good for our gut microbiome,” she explains. “So there are many reasons we should be eating them. But [baked beans](#), like many tinned foods, are often high in salt.”

Half a can of Heinz Baked Beans contains 1.3g of salt. “That is quite high, particularly if you’re then pairing it with a couple of slices of toast, which will also contain salt,” Ludwig explains.

The healthier option

Instead, the nutritionist recommends opting for low sugar and salt versions. Heinz Low Sugar Baked Beans come in at 0.9g per half can, while Tesco Reduced Sugar and Salt Beans come in at 0.6g per half can. Buying your beans in water, rather than brine and adding them to soups and salads would be a healthier option.

Soy sauce



A stalwart of Chinese cooking, soy sauce is traditionally very high in salt as the mineral is intrinsic to the fermentation process. “It’s something that we can liberally throw all over our food and not really think of the effects,” Ludwig explains.

On comparing different brands, the nutritionist found that many contain a similar high amount of salt. Ludwig says, “Kikkoman was one of the lowest, but even then you’re looking at 16.9g of salt per 100ml, so that’s about 2g salt if you’re putting just one tablespoon on your meal. There are low salt varieties, but often you may find yourself just using double or there may be something else added to create flavour while bringing down the salt content, so it’s important to check the labels.”

The healthier option

Instead, Ludwig suggests using different methods to bring out flavour in your dishes. “Using garlic, chilli and ginger to really layer flavour into your dishes can help reduce the reliance on salty sauces. Otherwise, teriyaki sauce tends to have a lower salt content, around 5.4g per 100g, while other alternatives like Coconut Aminos, which people with soy allergies often use as an alternative, offers flavour while containing about 10 times less salt than soy sauce.”

Crackers

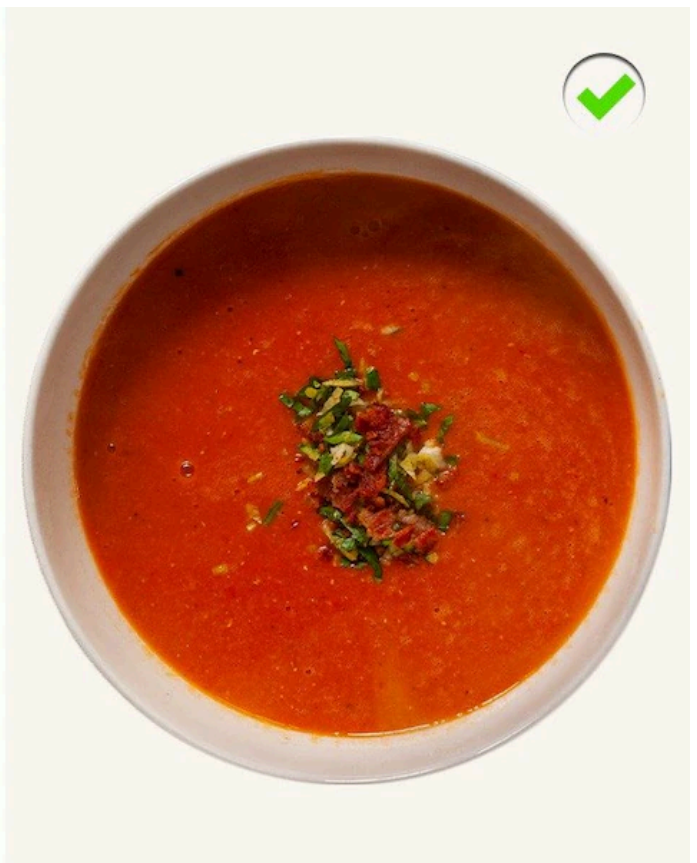


A snack staple, crackers can quickly top up your daily salt intake. “Heavier and more seeded crackers often contain slightly less salt,” Ludwig suggests, “the ones that are higher in salt are things like Tuc biscuits [2.4g per 100g] and Ritz crackers [1.3g per 100g]. Often, salt is added as a layer on top to stimulate our taste so it’s important to check the labels.”

The healthier option

Lighter salt options include Ryvitas [0.75g per 100g] and cream crackers – [Waitrose](#) own brand cream crackers contain 0.84g of salt per 100g, while [M&S](#) own brand contain 0.83g per 100g. Ludwig adds that you need to think about what you’re pairing crackers with. “Often, they’re a quick lunch option, but if you’re adding salty cheese or ham, that’s quickly filling up the majority of your allotted salt allowance for the day with just one meal.”

Tinned soups

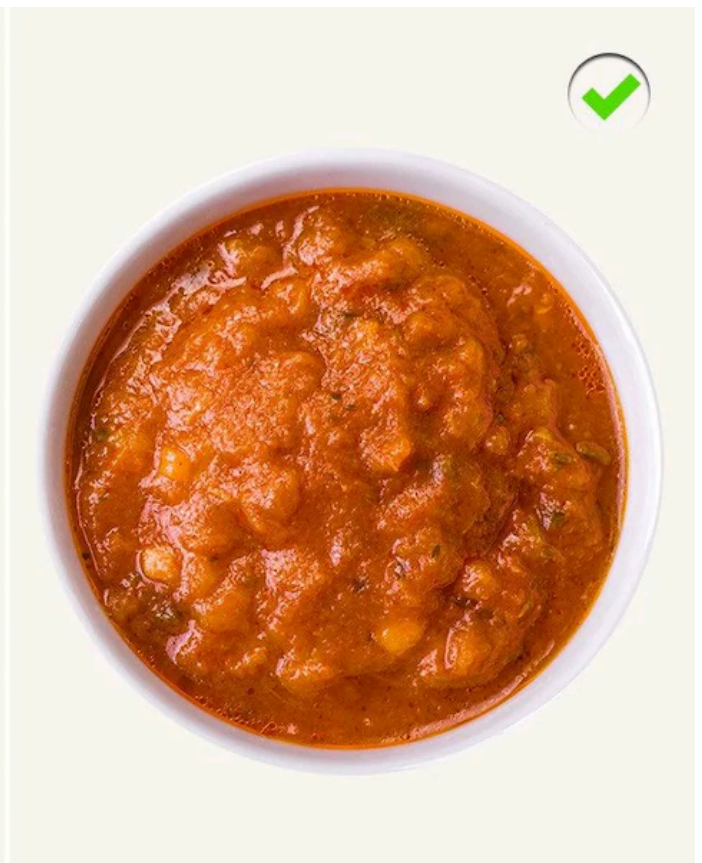


[Cans of soup](#) are perhaps one of the worst pantry contenders for highest salt content in our store cupboards. “Tinned soups can contain a lot of hidden salt.” Ludwig reveals. “In order to make watery vegetables taste nice, we normally have to add some sort of salt. So often, just half a can contains over a gram of salt, so if you eat the whole can that’s a lot of your daily allowance gone.” [Heinz Tomato Soup](#), for instance, contains 1.1g of salt per half can, while Baxters Leek and Potato soup contains 1.8g per half can.

The healthier option

Instead, Ludwig recommends making your own. “Get the flavour by using lots of fresh herbs and spices instead. For instance, by making a [carrot and coriander soup](#) with plenty of fresh coriander you’re diverting the flavour to the herbs rather than having to rely on salt.”

Pasta sauce



Another pantry regular to be wary of if you're watching your salt intake is [pasta](#) sauces. Ludwig warns, "They can have up to two grams a serving, especially the carbonara style sauces, and soon add up if you pour too much on your [pasta](#)."

Dolmio Bolognese Original Pasta Sauce contains 0.75g salt per 112g recommended serving, while Homepride Creamy Tomato & Herb Pasta Bake contains 1.13g per 1/4 jar. Meanwhile, Loyd Grossman Tomato & Roasted Garlic Sauce contains 0.82g per 100g.

The healthier option

Instead, Ludwig once again recommends making your own. "Again, it's about moving away from processed packets and jars that will contain higher salt and sugar content and making your own with fresh or [tinned tomatoes](#) and lots of flavours like garlic, onions and chilli so you're more in control."

Sweet chilli sauces

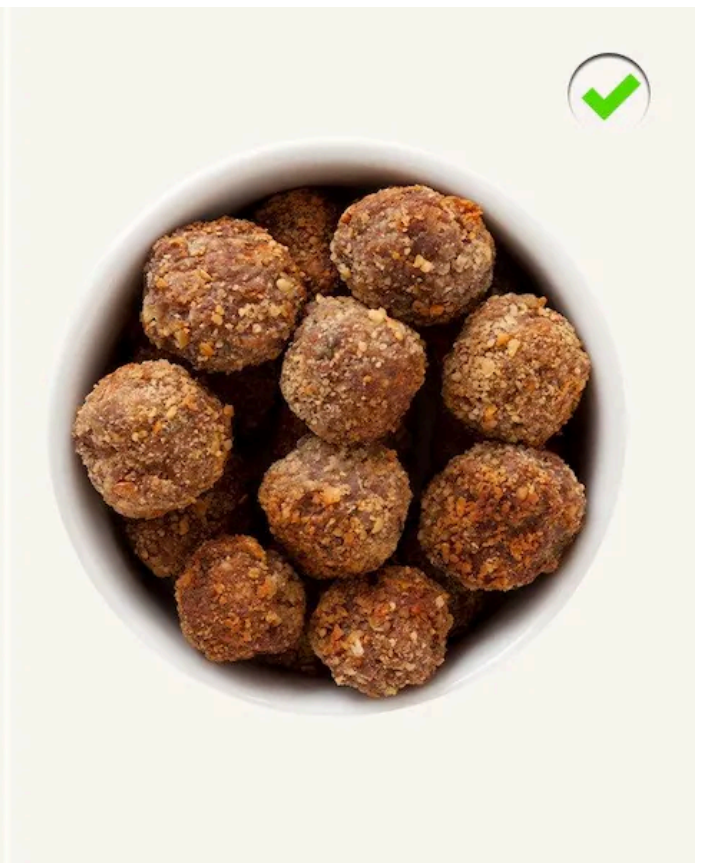


A tasty addition to many meals, but be careful when you reach for a bottle of sweet chilli sauce. Ludwig explains, “It depends on how much you’re using, as often they can contain around 4g of salt per 100ml [Blue Dragon Original Thai Sweet Chilli Sauce contains 4.3g salt per 100ml], which if you’re slathering it over everything could become an issue.”

The healthy option

If you’re using a lot, Ludwig recommends switching to Dr Will’s Sriracha Hot Sauce. “The salt content is much lower [0.44g per 100g] and the flavour is much more intense, so you won’t need to use as much either.”

Stuffing mix



Another Sunday roast classic, Ludwig says beware of portion sizes when it comes to stuffing mix. “Often, it has about 0.5g salt per stuffing ball [Paxo Sage & Onion Stuffing Mix contains 0.47g per 45g ball], so if you’re having more than one with your roast, it could start to add up.”

The healthier option

Ludwig’s advice is to once again make your own and watch the amount of salt you add. If that’s not possible, then being aware of portion sizes. Sticking to just one stuffing ball can help limit the salt content.

Chutneys and pickles



Another big hitter in your pantry salt department, it's worth watching out for chutneys and pickles. Patak's Mango Chutney, for instance, contains 2.98g salt per 100g, while Branston Pickle clocks in at 3.5g salt per 100g.

The healthier option

Ludwig says, "Swapping for a red onion chutney [M&S Caramelised Red Onion Chutney comes in at 0.7g salt per 100g] can help, but if you really must have it, see it as a treat to be rationed rather than piling it up."

Ketchup and condiments



When it comes to table sauces and condiments, the key is to enjoy them in moderation. Ludwig explains, “[Tomato ketchup](#) comes in at 0.3g of salt per 15g serving, while brown sauce is around 0.18g, Dijon mustard at 0.49g, and tartare sauce at 0.25g. These little amounts can add up across the day, so it’s important to be aware of portion size and use them sparingly.”

The healthier option

Often we go heavy with condiments on the side of our plate because our food is lacking flavour or even texture. You can easily add flavour by making your own dressings, adding spices and fresh herbs or making a quick dip using [Greek yogurt](#). But when it comes to condiments, it’s always best to read the label, use the least processed condiments possible, and to use them sparingly. Some brands are less ultra processed than others, for example Dr. Will’s.