Salt substitutes

Dear Alice,

I have recently started a low-sodium diet to lose water weight. I have one burning question though... Does salt substitute make you retain water like salt does or not? It tastes very similar but it is potassium instead of sodium chloride. Please help me.

Thank You,
Ashley

Answer

Dear Ashley,

The simple answer to your burning question is no, salt substitute will not make you retain water like salt does. As you had mentioned, salt substitute is different from salt because it contains potassium chloride instead of sodium chloride. Sodium chloride is a water-soluble molecule, which means that a high salt intake will cause your body to hold onto excess water. The same is not true of potassium chloride, which hasn?t been shown to cause water retention.

However, salt substitute is not a good option for everyone. Too much potassium in the body can build up in your kidneys and can cause damage. For individuals on certain medications, particularly to treat heart, kidney, or liver conditions, using potassium chloride may contribute to potassium retention. For these folks, salt substitutes are not recommended.

So, what are some other options for reducing your salt intake? Try experimenting with your cooking (or maybe start cooking more often? over 75 percent of the salt we eat comes from processed foods and eating out!). Instead of adding salt to your food, try using lemon juice, garlic, or garlic powder. Dress up your meals with fresh herbs like rosemary, tarragon, mint, or sage, and expand your horizons with spices like peppercorn, chili, and paprika.

It's also a good idea to play close attention to food labels. If a product is labeled ?sodium free? or ?salt free,? this means it contains less than 5mg of sodium per serving. ?Reduced sodium? means that the product contains at least 25 percent less sodium than the regular version. But buyer beware: some products still have very high levels of sodium to begin with. For example, a cup of reduced sodium chicken soup might be labeled ?low sodium,? but that reduction could be from 500mg to 300mg, which is still a lot of sodium for one serving! ?Lite? means that the product contains at least 50 percent less sodium than the regular version, and
no salt added? or ?unsalted? means there hasn?t been any extra salt added. But again, beware: sodium doesn?t only come from salt; many other ingredients are also high in sodium. Try to steer clear of products that include ingredients like monosodium glutamate (MSG) and baking soda (sodium bicarbonate).

As you explore your new food choices, you can check out the Go Ask Alice! Nutrition and Physical Activity archives for tips on healthier eating. You might also consider talking with a health professional or registered dietitian before making major changes to your diet.

The good news is that salt is an acquired taste ? by slowly reducing the amount of salt in your diet, you will gradually rely on it less. Over time, some salted foods might even taste too salty for you!

Alice!
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