



SALT AND CHEESE

Cheese is a natural product that has been made for centuries - there are even references to cheese in the bible (for example, David was delivering cheeses just before his altercation with Goliath!).

Salt is an integral part of the cheese making process and serves four distinct purposes:



when salt is mixed with the milled curds this slows down the development of the special bacteria added to the milk at the beginning of the cheese making process. These bacteria aid the formation of the curds and the whey; left unchecked they would cause the cheese to spoil very quickly.



the addition of salt at this stage accelerates the expulsion of whey from the curd - in the same way as putting salt onto sliced cucumber will expel water. This is an important part of the manufacturing process for hard and semi-soft cheese.



salt acts as a preservative in the cheese making process - especially important in the production of long keeping cheeses such as Cheddar. It inhibits the growth of undesirable bacteria.



finally, salt acts as a flavour enhancer - a lack of salt prevents the curds from maturing, which means the cheese would stay in its raw state and be inedible.

If there were no salt used in the manufacturing process the cheese produced would not taste very nice and would quickly become unfit to eat.

The salt normally used in cheese making is sodium chloride - exactly the same salt as you would use at home for cooking or in your salt cellar.

The salt content is normally shown on the nutritional labelling of most cheeses but is somewhat confusingly labelled as "sodium". This would be shown as the sodium content in grams or milligrams per 100 grams of cheese. A sodium content of 1 gram per 100 grams of cheese (1%) would be equivalent to a salt content of 2.5% (to convert sodium to salt multiply by 2.5).

British Cheese - yes please!

BRITISH
CHEESE
BOARD



The salt content of cheese varies between different types as shown in the table below:

Typical Sodium Content of cheese	Milligrams(mgs) of sodium per 100 grams of cheese
Fromage Frais - plain 8% fat	36
Cheese spreads - full fat (eg Philadelphia)	288
- medium fat	346
- low fat	438
Cottage Cheese	300
Cheshire/Wensleydale/Lancashire	502
Brie	556
Double Gloucester	590
Camembert	605
Red Leicester	630
Cheddar	723
Parmesan	756
Blue Stilton	788
Gouda	925
Edam	996
Danish Blue	1220
Processed slices	1390
Feta	1440
Roquefort	1670

Source: McCance and Widdowson's "The Composition of Foods" Sixth Summary Edition - Royal Society of Chemistry and Food Standards Agency - 2002

Soft and fresh cheeses have a relatively short shelf life due to their higher moisture content and thus require less salt than hard cheese. Many of the continental type hard cheeses use brine baths to add the salt and they tend to have a higher salt and sodium content.

The Food Standards Agency and Department of Health are urging people to be aware of how much salt we eat, with a view to adults cutting average daily intake of salt from 9.5 grams (3.8g of sodium) to 6 grams (2.4g of sodium). Recommended levels for children are lower.

For most of us, this should be manageable. By looking at food labels we can work out how best to reduce salt intake. Almost 75% of our salt is derived from processed foods, 10 to 15% added in cooking or at the table and 10 to 15% naturally occurring in unprocessed foods. Just by not adding salt at the table, intake can be reduced.

Taking account of the mixture of cheeses eaten in the UK in all forms (including cottage cheese, fromage frais and all cheese used in ready made convenience dishes, cheese eaten out of the home), the British Cheese Board estimates the average person's daily intake of sodium from cheese is 192mgs - equivalent to 480mgs of salt per day. This accounts for just 5% of the day's total intake of salt.

The British Cheese Board aims to increase consumption of cheese made by its members and provides information about cheese as part of a balanced diet.

What are the benefits of eating cheese?

- Hard cheese contains essential nutrients - protein, calcium, phosphorus and vitamin B12
- It is versatile and convenient to use as part of any meal occasion
- There are more than 700 named cheeses now produced in the UK alone

The British Cheese Board was formed in 1997 and its members account for the majority of cheese made in the UK.



For further information on the British Cheese Board and its members and the cheeses they produce go to www.britishcheese.com or e-mail us at enquiries@britishcheese.com

Published April 2010