**Salt**

There is something missing – you forgot to put salt in the water for the pasta, potatoes or vegetables, and now your dinner tastes bland and uninteresting. Or you’re at a party and you find yourself heading for the peanuts and crisps. Why? As soon as salt hits a certain spot on the side of your tongue, it sends a message to your brain and triggers a savoury sensation. No one is sure why saltiness, along with sweetness, bitterness and sourness, stands out as a ‘taste experience’. It could be because salt is an essential nutrient. Until modern times, salt was essential in another way – as a food preservative. Without salt to preserve supplies of meat and fish, people faced starvation in the hard winter months. Such a vital substance was obviously very valuable and throughout history salt has often been controlled by those in power for that reason. In medieval Europe, owning large quantities of salt was a sign of wealth. Salt acts as a preservative because its sodium ions extract water from living cells. This means that single-celled organisms like bacteria and fungi die in the presence of salt. On the other hand, in larger organisms like humans, this water transfer provides enough fluid in the blood vessels to maintain a healthy blood pressure. Salt’s other component, chloride, is essential for making acid in the stomach, which kills any harmful bacteria in the food we eat. Salt consumption varies greatly around the world. The Yanomami Indians in Brazil survive on 0.01 of a gram a day, while in some parts of northern China the daily diet contains up to 30 grams. The Department of Health says a daily salt intake of about 4 grams, a teaspoonful, is enough for the body’s needs. As you might expect from something which is so important for our physical well-being, too much salt causes problems. Four thousand years ago, Huang Di, the Yellow Emperor, warned “If too much salt is used in food, the pulse hardens.” What he was talking about is what we now call high blood pressure or hypertension.

However, the traditional connection between eating a lot of salt and hypertension is actually rather weak. Although recent studies show that an extra 6 grams of salt a day will certainly increase the pressure of blood pumped out of the heart, it would still not give a healthy person hypertension.

Questions:

1. **Without salt,**

**A** pasta cooks a lot quicker.

**B** meals have less flavour.

**C** vegetables take longer to cook.

**D** more water will be needed.

1. **One reason why we like salt so much may be because**

**A** most people prefer savoury foods.

**B** crisps are the most popular snack.

**C** it is very important for our health.

**D** it is full of nutrition.

1. **Salt can also be used**

**A** to season meat and fish.

**B** instead of money.

**C** in place of food.

**D** to store food safely.

1. **Salt will destroy**

**A** excess fluid. **C** dangerous organisms.

**B** stomach acid. **D** infected cells.

1. **In areas of China**

**A** the average diet contains a large amount of salt.

**B** the population eat two teaspoons of salt daily.

**C** there are various kinds of salt.

**D** a lot of salt is produced every day.

1. **Some health experts believe that**

**A** the Yanomani Indians consume the right amount of salt.

**B** humans should have a limited amount of salt.

**C** the human body can survive without salt.

**D** the amount of salt a person needs can vary greatly.

1. **Centuries ago, the**

**A** danger of eating too much salt was known.

**B** consumption of salt was much lower.

**C** symptoms of high blood pressure were different.

**D** term ‘hypertension’ was being used.

1. **The article concludes that the latest evidence**

**A** suggests that too much salt can damage the heart.

**B** does not prove a link between salt and hypertension.

**C** shows that less than 6 grams of salt a day is not harmful.

**D** cannot agree on a recommended daily consumption of salt.