



Cutting Down Salt & Sodium for Better Health

Salt & sodium - the basics

Sodium (Na) is the name of the mineral. Table salt is 40% sodium & 60% chloride, often with added iodine to prevent goiter & hypothyroidism.

Guidelines

The human body needs about 500 milligrams (mg) of sodium daily for optimal muscle & nerve function, & to maintain proper water and mineral balance. One teaspoon of salt contains 2300 mg of sodium. Americans eat about 1.5 teaspoons, or 3400 mg of sodium, daily — over twice the recommended intake.

Ideal daily intake:

- ◇ for those 14 & older, along with pregnant women — 1500 mg a day
- ◇ maximum intake advised for anyone over the age of 50, African Americans, & anyone with high blood pressure, diabetes, or chronic kidney disease — 1500 mg a day
- ◇ maximum recommended daily consumption to reduce the risk of chronic disease — 2300 mg a day

Why is too much sodium bad?

Your kidneys store sodium & release it as needed. Excess sodium is excreted in urine. When the kidneys can't eliminate excess sodium effectively or fast enough, it accumulates in your bloodstream. The body then holds on to water to dilute the sodium, which increases blood volume, making your heart pump harder & increasing pressure on your blood vessels. Over time this extra load can stiffen blood vessels & damage the aorta & kidneys, putting you at risk for high blood pressure, heart disease, heart attack, & stroke. High sodium levels can lead to congestive heart failure, chronic kidney disease, liver damage, osteoporosis, stomach cancer, & blindness.

Why is intake so high?

Some medications can be high in sodium, but around 75% of the sodium Americans eat comes from packaged processed foods, & restaurant & fast food meals. Top sources of sodium in American diets include: breads/rolls, cold cuts/sausages/cured meats, pizza, sandwiches, soups, cheese, processed chicken, burritos/tacos, snacks (like chips, popcorn, pretzels, crackers), tomato sauces, & egg dishes.

Commercially prepared sauces, salad dressings, condiments & gravies also tend to be high in sodium. Even foods like breakfast cereals & pastries can contain high sodium levels, even if they don't taste salty. And foods consumed numerous times a day, such as bread & cheese can add up to higher sodium intake even though individual servings are not high in sodium.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SALTS ?

Table salt is mined & finely ground, with iodine often added (iodized) to prevent goiter & hypothyroidism, & an anticaking agent added to prevent clumping. *Kosher salt* is coarser, usually does not contain iodine, & may contain an anticaking agent. *Himalayan pink salt* is mined, coarser due to less processing & may contain traces of minerals.

Sea salt is produced by the evaporation of salt water & may appear coarser & darker due to trace minerals, & impurities found in the sea such as lead & microscopic plastic.

Things you should know

- ⇒ Unprocessed fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, meats, some dairy foods are low in sodium
- ⇒ Human taste buds aren't sensitive enough to notice a minor reduction in salt of about 30%, & for many types of foods, salt reductions of up to 30% won't taste noticeably different
- ⇒ Once your taste buds adjust to less salt, you will find many foods are too salty for your taste
- ⇒ Genetics, hormones, aging & obesity may amplify the blood pressure-raising effects of high salt diets

Tips to reduce your sodium intake

- * Don't keep the salt shaker on the table
- * Don't automatically add salt before tasting your food — use sparingly when you do add salt
- * If you can't find salt-free or reduced/low-sodium versions of canned vegetables, drain & rinse the contents before using
- * Citrus like lemon can provide more flavor with less sodium — citrus and sodium activate the same taste sensors so that less sodium can be used
- * Try salt-free spice & herb seasoning blends — if you have diabetes or kidney issues, or take multiple medications, check with your healthcare provider before using seasonings with potassium chloride
- * Go easy on high-sodium condiments like soy sauce, mustard, & ketchup, plus pickles & sauerkraut
- * Avoid monosodium glutamate (MSG), commonly used in Chinese food & condiments
- * Limit consumption of packaged flavored instant noodle, potato, pasta, & rice dishes
- * Choose light or reduced sodium condiments, add oil & vinegar or lemon juice to salads rather than bottled dressings, & use only a small amount of seasoning from flavoring packets instead of the entire packet
- * Choose low sodium or no-salt-added nuts, seeds, & snack products (such as chips & pretzels) — or eat fruit or raw vegetables such as carrot or celery sticks instead
- * Choose fresh meat, poultry, & seafood, rather than processed varieties — check the package to see if salt water or saline has been added
- * If you do occasionally eat a high-sodium food, reduce the serving size to eat a smaller amount & increase your water intake to help your body re-establish its desired sodium-to-water ratio
- * Cook your own food to control the amount of salt added instead of eating processed foods, or restaurant or fast food meals
- * When you do eat out, ask for your meal to be prepared without salt, & request that sauces & salad dressings be served on the side — then use less of them
- * Consume less when eating out — choose smaller sizes, split an entrée with a friend, or take home part of your meal

Your secret weapon: Nutrition Facts food labels

The Nutrition Facts label on packaged foods is a wealth of information:

- * Use the label to compare brands — there is often a difference between products
- * Salt or sodium compounds listed in Ingredients adds to the sodium content of that food—the closer to the start of the list, the more of it there is in that food product
- * Avoid foods that have 500 mg or more of sodium per serving — especially watch for in frozen meals
- * Serving sizes can be deceptive —
 - for example, if a serving size is 4 oz (half a cup) but you normally consume a full cup, you need to double the amount of sodium listed to know how much you're consuming per serving
 - along the same line, a can of soup is often marked as 2 or 2.5 servings per can, whereas you might eat a bowl, rather than just a 7 or 8 ounce cup
 - condiments are often listed as 1 or 2 tablespoons, when you might normally use a quarter of a cup
- * Understand the % Daily Value (%DV) for a serving of food is calculated on 2300 mg per day, which may be higher than your recommended daily intake
- * As a general guide, 5% DV or less of sodium per serving is considered low, & 20% DV or more of sodium per serving is considered high