FOOD FACTS

U.S. FOOD & DRUG ADMINISTRATION

Sodium in Your Diet

Use the Nutrition Facts Label and Reduce Your Intake

You've probably heard that most Americans eat too much sodium, and too much sodium can raise blood pressure – which can have serious health consequences if not treated.

Despite what many people think, use of the salt shaker is *not* the main cause of too much sodium in your diet. In fact, about 75% of dietary sodium comes from eating **packaged and restaurant foods**, whereas only a small portion (11%) comes from salt added to food when cooking or eating. But, even though sodium is already *in* these foods when you purchase them, there are still some steps you *can* follow to lower your daily sodium intake.

Look at the Label!

Packaged foods and beverages can contain high levels of sodium, whether or not they *taste* salty. That's why it's important to use the Nutrition Facts label to check the sodium content.

- **Understand the Daily Value.** The Daily Values are amounts of nutrients to consume or not to exceed each day and are used to calculate the percent Daily Value. The Daily Value for sodium is **less than 2,300 milligrams (mg) per day.**
- **Use the Percent Daily Value (%DV) as a tool.** The %DV shows how much a nutrient in a serving of the food contributes to a total daily diet. When comparing and choosing foods, pick the food with a lower %DV of sodium. As a general rule:

  5% DV or less of sodium per serving is low
  20% DV or more of sodium per serving is high

- **Pay attention to serving sizes.** The %DV listed is usually for **one serving**, but one package may contain more than one serving. Be sure to look at the serving size to determine how many servings you are actually consuming. For example, if a package contains *two servings* and you eat the entire package, you are consuming *twice the amount of sodium* listed on the label.

Food Choices Matter!

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), almost half of the sodium consumed by Americans comes from the following foods, many of which are commercially processed or prepared:

- Breads and rolls
- Cheese (natural and processed)
- Cold cuts and cured meats (such as deli or packaged ham or turkey)
- Mixed meat dishes (such as beef stew, chili, and meat loaf)
- Mixed pasta dishes (such as lasagna, pasta salad, and spaghetti with meat sauce)
- Pizza
- Poultry (fresh and processed)
- Sandwiches (such as hamburgers, hot dogs, and submarine sandwiches)
- Savory snacks (such as chips, crackers, popcorn, and pretzels)
- Soups

But remember, the sodium content can vary significantly between similar types of foods. So, use the Nutrition Facts label to compare the amount of sodium in different foods and beverages, and select products that are lower in sodium. And, don't forget to check the serving size when comparing products in order to make an accurate comparison.

Salt and Sodium: Defined

The words "salt" and "sodium" are often used interchangeably, but they do not mean the same thing. Salt (also known by its chemical name, *sodium chloride*) is a crystal-like compound that is abundant in nature and is used to flavor and preserve food. Sodium is a mineral, and one of the *chemical elements* found in salt.

Sodium as a Food Ingredient

As a food ingredient, sodium has multiple uses, such as for curing meat, baking, thickening, retaining moisture, enhancing flavor (including the flavor of other ingredients), and as a preservative. Some common food additives – like monosodium glutamate (MSG), sodium bicarbonate (baking soda), sodium nitrite, and sodium benzoate – also contain sodium and contribute (in lesser amounts) to the total amount of "sodium" listed on the Nutrition Facts label.

Surprisingly, some foods that don't taste salty can still be high in sodium, which is why using taste alone is not an accurate way to judge a food's sodium content. For example, while some foods that are high in sodium (like pickles and soy sauce) *taste* salty, there are also many foods (like cereals and pastries) that contain sodium but *don't* taste salty. Also, some foods that you may eat several times a day (such as breads) can add up to a lot of sodium over the course of a day, even though an individual serving may not be high in sodium.

Check the Package for Nutrient Claims

You can also check for nutrient claims on food and beverage packages to quickly identify those that may contain less sodium. Here's a guide to common claims and what they mean:

What It Says	What It Means
Salt/Sodium-Free	Less than 5 mg of sodium per serving
Very Low Sodium	35 mg of sodium or less per serving
Low Sodium	140 mg of sodium or less per serving
Reduced Sodium	At least 25% less sodium than the regular product
Light in Sodium or Lightly Salted	At least 50% less sodium than the regular product
No-Salt-Added or Unsalted	No salt is added during processing – but these products may not be salt/sodium-free unless stated

Sodium and Blood Pressure

Sodium attracts water, and a high-sodium diet draws water into the bloodstream, which can increase the volume of blood and subsequently your blood pressure. **High blood pressure** (also known as **hypertension**) is a condition in which blood pressure remains elevated over time. Hypertension makes the heart work harder, and the high force of the blood flow can harm arteries and organs (such as the heart, kidneys, brain, and eyes).

And since blood pressure normally rises with age, limiting your sodium intake becomes even more important each year. The good news is that eating less sodium can help lower blood pressure, which in turn, can help reduce your risk of developing these serious medical conditions.

Potassium Can Help

Did you know that sodium and potassium both affect blood pressure? Diets higher in potassium can help control blood pressure by reducing the blood pressure-raising effects of sodium. The Daily Value for potassium is 4,700 mg per day. Use the Nutrition Facts label to check the potassium content of foods and aim for 100% DV on most days. Examples of foods rich in potassium include bananas, beet greens, juices (carrot, orange, pomegranate, and prune), yogurt (non-fat and low-fat), potatoes, spinach, sweet potatoes, tomatoes and tomato products, and white beans.

Health Facts

- Approximately 56% of adults in the U.S. (ages 18 years and older) have either hypertension or prehypertension (blood pressure that is higher than normal, but not high enough to be defined as hypertension).
- Approximately 10% of children in the U.S. (ages 8 to 17 years old) have either hypertension or prehypertension.
- Hypertension can lead to heart attacks, heart failure, stroke, kidney disease, and blindness.

Know Your Numbers

Sodium is an essential nutrient and is needed by the body in relatively *small amounts* (provided that substantial sweating does not occur) to maintain a balance of body fluids and keep muscles and nerves running smoothly. However, most Americans eat too much of it – and they may not even know it.

Americans eat on average about **3,400 mg of sodium per day**. However, the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommends that adults and children ages 14 years and older limit sodium intake to **less than 2,300 mg per day** – that's equal to about **1 teaspoon of salt**!

Adults with hypertension and prehypertension should further reduce their sodium intake to **1,500 mg per day**, which can result in even greater blood pressure reduction. So, talk to your healthcare provider about whether *you* are at risk for high blood pressure, and use the Nutrition Facts label as your tool to evaluate how much sodium you are eating and drinking. In addition, adults who would benefit from blood pressure lowering should combine lower sodium intake with the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) eating plan (see **http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/dash**).

10 Easy Tips For Reducing Sodium Consumption

Learning about sodium in foods and exploring new ways to prepare foods can help you achieve your sodium goal. And, if you follow these tips to reduce the amount of sodium you consume, your "taste" for sodium will gradually decrease over time – so eventually, you may not even miss it!

1. **Read the Nutrition Facts label**

   Read the Nutrition Facts label to see how much sodium is in foods and beverages. Most people should consume less than 100% of the Daily Value (or less than 2,300 mg) of sodium each day. Check the label to compare sodium in different brands of foods and beverages and choose those lower in sodium.

2. **Prepare your own food when you can**

   Limit packaged sauces, mixes, and "instant" products (including flavored rice, instant noodles, and ready-made pasta).

3. **Add flavor without adding sodium**

   Limit the amount of salt you add to foods when cooking, baking, or at the table. Try no-salt seasoning blends and herbs and spices instead of salt to add flavor to your food.

4. **Buy fresh**

   Choose fresh meat, poultry, and seafood, rather than processed varieties. Also, check the package on fresh meat and poultry to see if salt water or saline has been added.

5. **Watch your veggies**

   Buy fresh, frozen (no sauce or seasoning), or low sodium or no-salt-added canned vegetables.

6. **Give sodium the "rinse"**

   Rinse sodium-containing canned foods, such as beans, tuna, and vegetables before eating. This removes some of the sodium.

7. **"Unsalt" your snacks**

   Choose low sodium or no-salt-added nuts, seeds, and snack products (such as chips and pretzels) – or have carrot or celery sticks instead.

8. **Consider your condiments**

   Sodium in condiments can add up. Choose light or reduced sodium condiments, add oil and vinegar to salads rather than bottled dressings, and use only a small amount of seasoning from flavoring packets instead of the entire packet.

9. **Reduce your portion size**

   Less food means less sodium. Prepare smaller portions at home and consume less when eating out — choose smaller sizes, split an entrée with a friend, or take home part of your meal.

10. **Make lower-sodium choices at restaurants**

    Ask for your meal to be prepared without salt and request that sauces and salad dressings be served "on the side," then use less of them. You can also ask to see nutrition information (available in many chain restaurants), and then choose options that are lower in sodium.

For more information, contact the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition's Food and Cosmetic Information Center at **1-888-SAFEFOOD** (toll free), Monday through Friday 10 AM to 4 PM ET (except Thursdays from 12:30 PM to 1:30 PM ET and Federal holidays). Or, visit the FDA website at **http://www.fda.gov/educationresourcelibrary**