

# Sodium

## What Does Sodium Do?

Your body uses sodium (a mineral) in several ways:

- To keep a proper balance of water
- To transmit nerve signals
- To regulate blood pressure

However, too much sodium from food can raise blood pressure. High blood pressure (hypertension) is a major risk factor for heart disease, stroke, and kidney disease.

The good news is that a healthy eating plan can prevent or reduce high blood pressure. Choosing and preparing foods with less sodium is an important part of a healthy diet. Also include plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat milk and yogurt.

## How Much Sodium Do You Need?

Healthy adults need only 500 milligrams (mg) of sodium per day. That's about  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon of salt per day. Most Americans consume much more sodium than that—about 4,000 to 6,000 mg daily.

## How Much Sodium Is Too Much?

- Healthy people who do not have high blood pressure should limit sodium to 2,300 mg per day.
- Individuals with certain medical conditions, such as high blood pressure, kidney disease, congestive heart failure, or liver disease, may need to restrict sodium even more.

## Which Foods Have Sodium?

A common source of sodium is salt added to food during cooking or at the table.

In addition, salt and other sources of sodium are added to many processed foods. High-sodium processed foods include:

- Salty snack foods
- Ketchup and mustard
- Cured and processed meats
- Processed cheese
- Canned soups, vegetables, beans, and meats
- Soup, rice, and pasta mixes
- Soy sauce
- Hoisin sauce
- Monosodium glutamate (MSG)
- Garlic salt, onion salt, celery salt, and seasoned salt



## Tips for Cutting Back on Sodium in Restaurants

- Always taste foods before adding any seasonings, particularly salt.
- Ask that foods be prepared without added salt.
- Use pepper or lemon juice to enhance flavors.
- Go easy on condiments, dressings, gravy, and sauces. Order foods without them, or have them served on the side.
- Keep it simple:
  - Order a plain cut of meat, broiled fish, or piece of chicken instead of entrées covered with sauce, gravy, or cheese.
  - Choose plain meat sandwiches with fresh vegetable toppings instead of chicken salad, egg salad, or tuna salad sandwiches.
- On the menu, look for words that suggest a food is probably high in sodium: cured, corned, pickled, smoked, broth, soy sauce, teriyaki sauce, au jus, or marinated.

## Tips for Cutting Back on Sodium at Home

- Read food labels. The amount of sodium in one serving will be listed on the Nutrition Facts panel. Select foods with less than 200 mg sodium per serving.
- Cut the salt in your favorite recipes by half, or leave out the salt completely. With time, your taste buds will adjust to less salt.
- Buy unprocessed foods. Good choices include:
  - Fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables
  - Unseasoned whole grain foods, such as brown rice, whole wheat pasta, or plain oatmeal
  - Unseasoned meats, poultry, and fish
  - Dried (not canned) beans, lentils, and peas
  - Eggs, milk, and yogurt
- Use herbs or salt-free seasonings instead of salt to boost flavors. You'll get the most flavor if you add herbs or spices to cooked foods within 1 hour of serving.
- Remember that sea salt has sodium just like regular table salt.
- Be aware that low-sodium versions of some foods, such as soy sauce, are still very high in sodium. Use these foods sparingly, or try a different seasoning.
- Keep the salt shaker off the table.

