

## Why is Sodium **BAD**?

Sodium is an essential nutrient, so why is there so much concern about it these days? If you're like most Americans, you probably are taking in more sodium than your body needs. Most people consume about 3,400 milligrams of sodium a day – more than twice the 1,500 milligrams recommended by the American Heart Association. Adults should eat a maximum of about one teaspoon, or about 2,300 milligrams of sodium each day.

One-third of American adults have high blood pressure and a high-sodium diet may be to blame. For some, sodium increases blood pressure because it causes your body to retain fluid, which makes your heart work harder. Blood pressure naturally rises with age, and consuming less sodium will help reduce the increase as well as the risk of developing other health conditions associated with excess sodium, such as stroke, heart failure, stomach cancer and kidney disease.

### ***DID YOU KNOW...***

***A fast food burger or sandwich can contain more than 100 percent of the sodium you need in a day? You may be consuming more sodium than your heart can handle.***

Roughly 90 percent of American adults are expected to develop high blood pressure over their lifetimes. Many are unaware they have high blood pressure because there are no symptoms. When high blood pressure goes untreated, it causes damage to arteries and vital organs throughout the body.

However, there are other concerns with excess sodium consumption. Because we lose more calcium the more salt we eat, sodium also increases the risk of osteoporosis. The good news is that small dietary changes can help prevent or reverse these health consequences.

### **Setting the Record Straight**

The biggest contributor to sodium consumption is not the salt shaker on the table. Approximately 75 percent of the sodium consumed is in packaged, processed foods. This makes it harder to limit how much sodium you are eating because it already is added to many foods before they are purchased.

Many people resist a lower sodium diet because they believe their food will taste bland with less salt. However, it doesn't have to, especially

if proper cooking techniques, spices and other flavorful ingredients are used. With a gradual reduction in added sodium, you will start to appreciate foods for their true flavors, and over time, taste buds adjust to actually prefer less salt. Studies have shown that when people are given a lower sodium diet for a period of time, they begin to prefer lower-sodium foods and the foods they used to enjoy taste too salty.

*Approximate* amounts of sodium (in milligrams) found in table salt:

- 1/4 teaspoon salt = 575 milligrams sodium
- 1/2 teaspoon salt = 1,150 milligrams sodium
- 1 teaspoon salt = 2,300 milligrams sodium

What you probably don't know is that a lot of common foods add more sodium to your diet than you might think. It's not just French fries and potato chips that need to be eaten in moderation.



The American Heart Association/American Stroke Association has identified the top six foods that contribute the most sodium to our diets, labeling them the "Salty Six." Even though these foods don't necessarily taste salty, the sodium they contain can add up when eaten frequently.

Sodium is found in breads and rolls, soups, sandwiches, cold cuts, pizza and poultry. One slice of bread, for example, can contain up to 230 milligrams of sodium, while a serving of turkey cold cuts can contain as much as 1,050 milligrams.

Note that different brands of the same kinds of foods can vary widely in sodium content.

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## Tips to Reduce Sodium Intake

- Pick fresh and frozen poultry that hasn't been injected with a sodium solution. Check the packaging for terms like "broth," "saline" or "sodium solution." Sodium levels in unseasoned fresh meats are around 100 milligrams per 4-ounce serving.
- When choosing soup, select lower-sodium varieties.
- Make sandwiches with lower-sodium meats and low-fat, low-sodium cheeses, and go light on the condiments.
- Use spices, herbs onions, garlic, citrus juices and vinegars in place of salt to add flavor to foods.
- Take the salt shaker off the table.
- Choose condiments and toppings carefully. Soy sauce, bottled salad dressings, ketchup, jarred salsas, mustard, pickles, olives and relish tend to be high in sodium. Look for a reduced or lower-sodium version.
- Purchase canned vegetables labeled "no salt added."
- Drain and rinse canned beans (like chickpeas and kidney beans) and vegetables, which can cut the sodium by up to 40 percent.
- Combine lower-sodium versions of food with regular versions. This works especially well for broths, soups and tomato-based pasta sauces.
- Cook pasta and rice without salt. Once you add other ingredients to these foods, you won't notice any difference.

**THE SALTY SIX**

**DID YOU KNOW?** American Heart Association. life is why™

**THESE SIX POPULAR FOODS CAN ADD HIGH LEVELS OF SODIUM TO YOUR DIET\***

The American Heart Association recommends that you aim to eat less than 1,500 mg of sodium per day.

When you see the Heart-Check mark on a product, you know the food has been certified to meet nutritional criteria for heart-healthy foods, including sodium.

**1 BREADS & ROLLS**  
Some foods that you eat several times a day, such as bread, add up to a lot of sodium even though each serving may not seem high in sodium. Check the labels to find lower-sodium varieties.

**2 COLD CUTS & CURED MEATS**  
One 2 oz. serving, or 6 thin slices, of deli meat can contain as much as half of your daily recommended dietary sodium. Look for lower-sodium varieties of your favorite lunch meats.

**3 PIZZA**  
A slice of pizza with several toppings can contain more than half of your daily recommended dietary sodium. Limit the cheese and add more veggies to your next slice.

**4 POULTRY**  
Sodium levels in poultry can vary based on preparation methods. You will find a wide range of sodium in poultry products, so it is important to choose wisely.

**5 SOUP**  
Sodium in one cup of canned soup can range from 100 to as much as 940 milligrams—more than half of your daily recommended intake. Check the labels to find lower sodium varieties.

**6 SANDWICHES**  
A sandwich or burger from a fast food restaurant can contain more than 100 percent of your daily suggested dietary sodium. Try half a sandwich with a side salad instead.

\*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR), Vital Signs: Food Categories Contributing the Most to Sodium Consumption—United States, 2007–2008, February 10, 2012 / 61(05),92–98.  
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The Kansas Hospital Association and Healthworks have created a series of resources designed to inform and support efforts to promote healthy food and beverage environments in Kansas hospitals. The content of this document is based on information available on the American Heart Association website at [www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org). These resources are funded in part by the Kansas Health Foundation. For more information, visit [www.HealthyKansasHospitals.org](http://www.HealthyKansasHospitals.org).

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