About 90% of Americans consume too much sodium. Your body needs only a small amount of sodium to function properly.¹ Too much sodium is bad for your health and can lead to high blood pressure, which is a major risk factor for heart disease and stroke.²

Q: What is the difference between salt and sodium?
A: Sodium chloride is the chemical name for dietary salt.³ Sodium, which is a mineral, is an element found in salt.⁴ They are not the same but are often used interchangeably, and both may appear on a food label. For example, the Nutrition Facts label uses “sodium,” whereas the front of the package may say “salt free.”⁵

Q: Why is reducing sodium intake important?
A: High sodium consumption raises blood pressure, and high blood pressure is a major cause of heart disease and stroke.⁶ The average daily sodium consumption for Americans aged 1 and older is more than 3,400 milligrams (mg), far more than the recommended upper limit of 2,300 mg.⁶,⁷ Even people without high blood pressure should keep their sodium intake below this limit to reduce their risk of heart disease and stroke.⁶

Q: How much sodium should I get?
A: The Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2020–2025 recommends that American adults consume less than 2,300 mg of sodium each day as part of a healthy eating pattern.⁷

Q: How much sodium should my child get?
A: The Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2020–2025 recommends that healthy children 1 to 3 years old should consume less than 1,200 mg of sodium per day, children 4 to 8 years old consume less than 1,500 mg, children 9 to 13 years old consume less than 1,800 mg, and children 14 years old and older less than 2,300 mg.⁷ Children who consume high amounts of sodium have an increased risk of developing high blood pressure in childhood.⁸

The average daily sodium consumption for Americans aged 1 and older is more than 3,400 milligrams (mg)

2,300 mg (recommended level)

2,400 mg

Reducing the average sodium consumption by 1,000 mg could prevent:

- 35,000 new and recurrent heart attacks
- 23,000 new strokes
Q: Where does most of the sodium in my diet come from?
A: Most of the sodium you eat comes from processed foods (e.g., hot dogs, sausages, ham, luncheon meats) and restaurant foods. You can’t control the amount of sodium in these foods, so it’s important to limit them in your diet. "Processed food" includes food that has been cooked, canned, frozen, packaged, or changed in nutritional composition by fortifying, preserving, or preparing it in different ways. Any time we cook, bake, or prepare food, we’re processing it.

Q: Will I get iodine deficiency if I lower my sodium intake?
A: Most of the sodium Americans consume comes from processed and restaurant foods. In most industrialized countries, including the United States, salt used in food processing is not iodized. So reducing the amount of sodium from these foods would have minimal effect on iodine intake.

Q: What does “salt sensitive” mean? Who is “salt sensitive”?
A: When a person is salt-sensitive, their blood pressure goes up more than usual when they consume sodium. People with salt sensitivity often are older and/or Black and/or have high blood pressure, diabetes, or chronic kidney disease. There is no screening test for salt sensitivity.

Q: What do the different sodium-related terms mean on food packages?
A:• Sodium free—contains less than 5 mg of sodium per serving and no sodium chloride
• Very low sodium—contains 35 mg of sodium or less per serving
• Low sodium—contains 140 mg of sodium or less per serving
• Reduced sodium—contains at least 25% less sodium per serving than usual
• Light (for reduced-sodium products)—the food is "low calorie" and "low fat" and sodium is reduced by at least 50% per serving
• Light in sodium—sodium is reduced by at least 50% per serving

What can I do to reduce my sodium intake?
• Read the Nutrition Facts label while shopping to find the lowest sodium versions of your favorite foods. Foods considered low in sodium have less than 5% of the daily value of sodium per serving.
• Eat lots of fresh fruits and vegetables, frozen fruits and vegetables without sauce, and canned vegetables with no salt added.
• Limit processed foods high in sodium.
• Consider eating more meals at home.
• Use alternatives such as herbs and spices instead of salt when cooking.
• When buying packaged or prepared foods, choose foods labeled “low sodium,” “reduced sodium,” or “no salt added.”
• When eating out, ask for lower sodium options.
References


For more information, please contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:
1600 Clifton Road, Atlanta, GA 30333
Telephone: 1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636)/TTY: 1-888-232-6348
E-mail: cdcinfo@cdc.gov
Web: www.cdc.gov
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