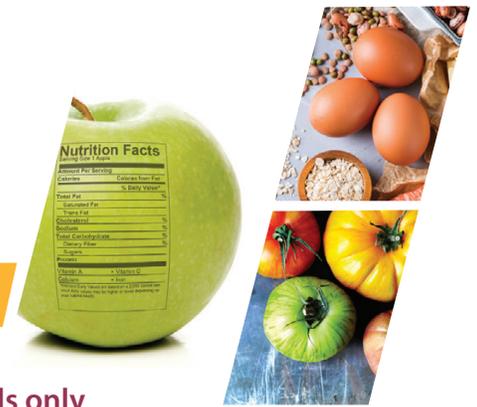


# Q & A sodium



**About 90% of Americans consume too much sodium. Your body needs only a small amount of sodium to function properly.<sup>1</sup> Excess sodium is bad for your health and can lead to high blood pressure, which is a major risk factor for heart disease and stroke, the first and fifth leading causes of death in the United States.<sup>2</sup>**

## Q: Is it salt or sodium?

**A:** Sodium chloride is the chemical name for dietary salt.<sup>3</sup> The words “salt” and “sodium” are not the same, but consumers often use them interchangeably. The use of both terms may be seen on food packaging; for example, the Nutrition Facts label uses “sodium,” whereas the front of the package may say “salt free.”<sup>4</sup> About 90% of the sodium we consume is in the form of salt.<sup>3</sup>

## 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.<sup>3</sup> The average daily sodium consumption for Americans aged 2 years and older is more than 3,400 milligrams (mg), considerably above the recommended upper limit of 2,300 mg per day.<sup>5,6</sup> Even if a person does not have high blood pressure, they should keep their sodium intake to this recommended level to reduce their risk of heart disease and stroke.<sup>5</sup> Nearly half of all American adults have high blood pressure.<sup>7</sup> In the United States, reducing the average sodium consumption by 400 mg could prevent 20,000 to 32,000 heart attacks and 13,000 to 20,000 strokes

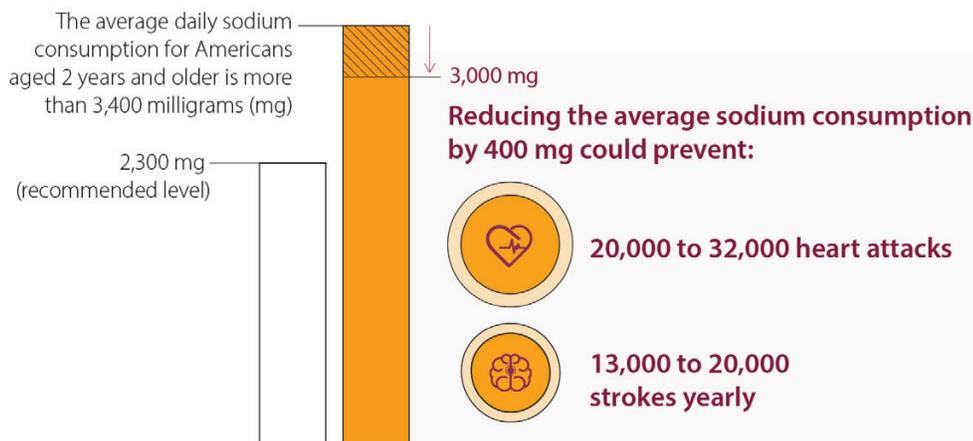
yearly.<sup>8</sup> Also, a sodium reduction of 1,200 mg per day can help reduce the number of individuals living with high blood pressure by an estimated 11 million and, over the course of 10 years, can prevent 280,000 to 500,000 deaths and save \$10 billion to \$24 billion in health care costs.<sup>8-10</sup>

## Q: What are the dietary guidelines for sodium?

**A:** The [2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) recommends that American adults consume less than 2,300 mg of sodium each day as part of a healthy eating pattern.<sup>6</sup>

## Q: How much sodium should children consume?

**A:** According to the *2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, healthy children 1 to 3 years old should consume less than 1,500 mg of sodium per day, children 4 to 8 years old should consume less than 1,900 mg of sodium per day, children 9 to 13 years old should consume less than 2,200 mg of sodium per day, and children 14 years old and up should consume less than 2,300 mg of sodium per day.<sup>6</sup> Children who consume high amounts of sodium are at greater risk of developing elevated blood pressure in childhood than children whose sodium consumption is significantly lower.<sup>11</sup>



## Q: Where does most of the sodium in our diet come from?

**A:** Most of the sodium we eat comes from processed foods and foods prepared in restaurants. When sodium is added to processed foods, it cannot be removed. Therefore, it is important to limit the amount of high sodium foods consumed and reduce daily sodium intake to a healthy level.<sup>12</sup>

### More than 40% of sodium intake comes from the following 10 types of foods:<sup>12</sup>

- |                              |                       |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Breads and rolls          | 6. Burritos and tacos |
| 2. Pizza                     | 7. Savory snacks*     |
| 3. Sandwiches                | 8. Chicken            |
| 4. Cold cuts and cured meats | 9. Cheese             |
| 5. Soups                     | 10. Eggs and omelets  |

\*Chips, popcorn, pretzels, snack mixes, and crackers

To learn more about the sodium content in a specific food, check the Nutrition Facts label for the sodium content per serving. The sodium content is listed in milligrams.<sup>12</sup>

## Q: What does “salt sensitive” mean? Who is “salt sensitive”?

**A:** Although nearly everyone can benefit from sodium reduction, some people are more salt sensitive than others—that is, they experience greater changes in blood pressure in relation to changes in sodium consumption.<sup>3</sup> These individuals often include people who are older or black or who have high blood pressure, diabetes, or chronic kidney disease.<sup>3</sup> Currently, no screening test exists for salt-sensitive people.

## Q: Iodized table salt provides iodine. Will reducing salt intake lead to iodine deficiency?

**A:** Most of the sodium Americans consume comes from processed and restaurant foods.<sup>13</sup> In most industrialized countries, including the United States, salt used in food processing is not iodized.<sup>14</sup> Reducing sodium in these foods would have minimal effect on the amount of iodine available for the population.<sup>15</sup>

## Q: How will reducing sodium affect the taste of foods?

**A:** Research has found that sodium reductions of up to 20% are not noticeable to consumers, depending on the food product.<sup>3</sup> Consuming less sodium may decrease a person's preference for salt or sodium and lead to reduced consumption.



## Q: Are other countries working on sodium reduction?

**A:** According to the World Health Organization, the global target is to reduce sodium consumption by 30%. This is the only nutrition-specific target in the Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases 2013–2020, which focuses on achieving a 25% reduction in premature mortality from avoidable noncommunicable diseases by 2025. For population health, the World Health Organization recommends consumption of less than 2 grams (2,000 mg) of sodium per day.<sup>16</sup>

The number of countries putting salt reduction strategies into action continues to grow. Approximately 75 countries have mandatory or voluntary initiatives to help reduce sodium intake in populations. Countries such as Australia, Argentina, Canada, Finland, France, Ireland, Japan, Kuwait, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom have had or currently have national activities on sodium reduction.<sup>17,18</sup> Finland has used media campaigns, worked with the food industry to provide lower sodium food options, and created food labeling legislation. The United Kingdom has developed sodium reduction targets, public health campaigns, and front-of-package labeling systems to counter increasing sodium intake.<sup>17</sup> From 2014 to 2019, England reported a 7% overall reduction in the average estimated salt intake, equivalent to a reduction of approximately 500 mg per day.<sup>19</sup>

**Resolve to Save Lives**, a global public health initiative, works with local, national, and global partners to monitor sodium consumption and carry out proven sodium reduction strategies. Sodium reduction efforts are currently underway in China, Ethiopia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. In 2019, China launched its first major mass media campaign illustrating the risks of consuming too much sodium.<sup>20</sup>

## What can individuals do to reduce sodium consumption?

Consumers can take charge of their health and reduce their risk of heart disease by taking the following steps to reduce their sodium consumption:

- Read the Nutrition Facts label while shopping to find the lowest sodium options of your favorite foods. Foods considered low in sodium have less than 5% of the daily value of sodium per serving.
- Eat a diet rich in fresh fruits and vegetables, frozen fruits and vegetables without sauce, and canned vegetables with no salt added.
- Limit processed foods high in sodium.
- When purchasing packaged or prepared foods, choose foods labeled “low sodium” or “reduced sodium.”
- When eating out, request lower sodium options.
- Support initiatives that reduce sodium in foods in cafeterias and vending machines.<sup>23</sup>



### Q: Are states or localities in the United States working on sodium reduction?

**A:** Yes. Many state and local governments have developed plans or are taking action to reduce sodium. Examples of sodium reduction activities include developing position statements or issue briefs, educating stakeholders, making information available to consumers at the point of purchase, and adopting healthful food service guidelines.<sup>21</sup> State and local governments are also participating in the [National Salt and Sugar Reduction Initiative](#), led by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. To increase the availability and accessibility of lower sodium foods for consumers, CDC launched the Sodium Reduction in Communities Program (SRCP) in 2010. In its [third round](#) (2016–2021 funding cycle), the SRCP provides technical assistance and programmatic support to eight funded states and localities to reduce sodium consumption in schools, universities, hospitals, worksites, and community meal settings to the limits recommended by the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.<sup>22</sup>

### Q: Other countries or organizations report dietary sodium guidelines in grams or millimoles. What is the conversion?

**A:** Sodium chloride, commonly known as salt, consists of 40% sodium and 60% chloride. One level teaspoon of salt contains approximately 2,300 mg of sodium.

- To convert milligrams of sodium to milligrams of salt, multiply the milligrams of sodium by 2.5.<sup>3</sup>
- To convert millimoles of sodium to milligrams of sodium, multiply the millimoles of sodium by 23.<sup>3</sup>
- To convert millimoles of sodium to milligrams of sodium chloride, multiply the millimoles of sodium by 58.5.<sup>3</sup>

Learn more at the [CDC salt website](#).

### Q: What do these 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 sodium reduced 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<sup>24</sup>

#### For more information, please contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

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