

Sodium: the facts

The body needs a small amount of sodium to function, but most Americans consume too much sodium. High sodium consumption can raise blood pressure, and high blood pressure is a major risk factor for heart disease and stroke.¹ Heart disease and stroke are the nation's first and fifth leading causes of death.²

Salt and High Blood Pressure

- Research shows a strong dose-dependent relationship between consuming too much salt and raised levels of blood pressure.¹
- When salt intake is reduced, blood pressure begins falling within weeks on average.³
- Populations who consume diets low in salt do not experience the increase in blood pressure with age that is seen in most Western countries.¹
- Reducing sodium intake lowers blood pressure, with greater effects among people with hypertension.^{4*}

Is It Salt or Is It Sodium?

- Sodium chloride is the chemical name for salt.¹
- The words salt and sodium are not exactly the same, yet these words are often used interchangeably. For example, the Nutrition Facts Panel uses "sodium," while the front of the package may say "no salt added" or "unsalted."⁵
- Ninety percent of the sodium we consume is in the form of salt.¹

Sodium Consumption and Sodium in Our Food Supply

- We all need a small amount of sodium to keep our bodies working properly.¹
- The *2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommend that Americans consume less than 2,300 milligrams (mg) of sodium each day as part of a healthy eating pattern.⁶

- About 90% of Americans 2 years old or older consume too much sodium.⁷
- The average daily sodium intake for Americans 2 years old or older is more than 3,400 mg.⁸
- Americans are consuming substantially more sodium than in the 1970s. Since 2010, some manufacturers have reduced sodium in some foods, and the amount of sodium consumed has decreased slightly in some groups of people.^{7,9}
- More than 70% of sodium consumed is from processed and restaurant foods. Only a small portion of sodium or salt is used in cooking or added at the table.¹⁰
- Because sodium is already in processed and restaurant foods when they are purchased, reducing personal sodium intake can be hard, even for motivated people.¹¹
- Sodium content can vary across the same types of foods by brand. For example, a slice of frozen cheese pizza can have between 370 mg and 730 mg of sodium; a cheeseburger from a fast food restaurant can have between 710 mg and 1,690 mg.¹²
- Sodium information currently is not always readily available for restaurant or prepared foods and can be hard for the consumer to estimate.

Reducing Sodium and Reducing Cardiovascular Disease Burden

- Lowering high blood pressure reduces the risk of heart disease and stroke.¹³ Adults with prehypertension and hypertension especially benefit from lowering their blood pressure.^{6†}
- If manufacturers gradually reduced the amount of sodium in processed and prepared foods, public consumption of sodium could be reduced to safer levels with little or no change in behavior on the part of the individual consumer.¹⁴
- Sodium intake from processed and restaurant foods contributes to high rates of high blood pressure, heart attack, and stroke. Because nearly 400,000 deaths each year are attributed to high blood pressure, reducing sodium intake could prevent thousands of deaths annually.¹⁵

- Reducing average population sodium intake to 2,300 mg per day may save \$18 billion in health care dollars and reduce cases of high blood pressure by 11 million annually.¹⁶
- Sodium reduction continues to be an effective and safe strategy to lower blood pressure.^{3,11,17,18}
- Lowering blood pressure reduces and prevents heart attacks and stroke.¹⁹

* Hypertension is having blood pressure that is consistently high, defined by systolic blood pressure of 140 mm Hg or higher and diastolic blood pressure of 90 mm Hg or higher.

† Prehypertension is systolic blood pressure that is 120 to 139 mm Hg and diastolic blood pressure that is 80 to 89 mm Hg.

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