

GET THE FACTS:

The Role of Sodium in Your Food



Where Does Dietary Sodium Come From?

Although many people are quick to blame the salt shaker, only a small amount of dietary sodium is added during home cooking and at the table. An overwhelming majority of sodium consumed—more than 75%—comes from restaurant, prepackaged, and processed foods, including many products that don't even taste salty. For consumers to make informed decisions about what they eat, it's helpful to understand the role that sodium plays in different foods.

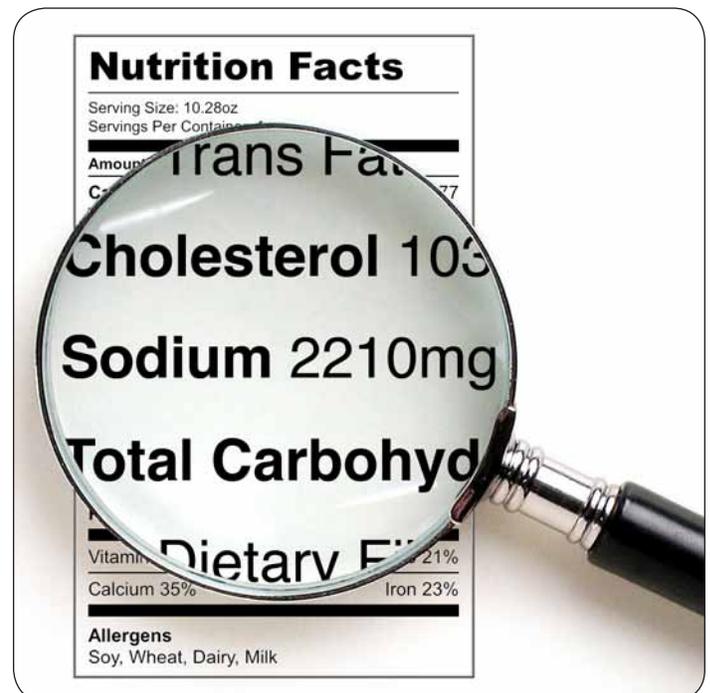
Why Is Sodium Added to Processed Food?

Sodium plays many roles in our foods, mainly:

- To Enhance Flavor
 - Adds a salty taste
 - Boosts flavor balance and can enhance the sweetness of sugary items
 - Masks "off notes," such as bitterness and strange tastes, that can result from food processing
 - Makes some types of processed foods more palatable
- To Preserve Freshness
 - Increases shelf life
 - Helps prevent growth of bacteria and other disease-causing agents
- To Improve Texture and Appearance
 - Makes the product seem thicker or fuller
 - Enhances color and hue
 - Helps retain moisture in processed meat products as a trade-off for saturated fat
 - Stabilizes texture, allowing bread to rise and cheese to stick together
 - Prevents unwanted chemical changes to other ingredients in many baked items

Why Is Eating Too Much Sodium a Bad Idea?

- Our bodies require only a small amount of sodium each day to function normally. Eating too much sodium can lead to increased blood pressure, which can raise the risk of heart attack, stroke, and other cardiovascular conditions.
- On average, American adults exceed their recommended daily limit of sodium.
- Reducing your sodium intake can help lower your blood pressure and improve the health of your heart.



Sodium levels may vary greatly in otherwise similar products.

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Is All of This Sodium Necessary?

- **In many cases, no.** For many products, sodium's technical functions can be accomplished with lower levels than are currently being used.
- **Alternatives to added sodium do exist.**
- **Many familiar products already contain lower amounts of sodium in other countries.** This international variability indicates that these companies could readily introduce lower sodium versions of popular products in the United States.
- Sodium levels in similar U.S. products vary greatly across—and even within—brands, indicating consumers' willingness to buy less salty products.
- Although many food manufacturers express concern about the altered taste of low sodium products, **salt is an acquired taste.** Some research indicates that consumers—and their taste buds—adapt to the taste of lower sodium foods.
- Certain study results indicate that when a reduced-sodium version of a popular food is served, the typical consumer adds less than 20% of the removed sodium back. This behavior demonstrates that **individuals are relatively comfortable with gradual sodium reductions in products.**
- There are several new salt substitutes on the market—and many more in development.

Learn more at www.cdc.gov/salt

SODIUM LEVELS VARY BY COUNTRY

UNITED KINGDOM



320 mg (per 100 g serving)



Popular Restaurant Chain Veggie Pizza

UNITED STATES



610 mg (per 100 g serving)

For more information please contact Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
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