

# Salt, Blood Pressure & Your Health

## Cut Back On Sodium

- Look at Nutrition Facts labels and try to choose foods that have less than 5% of the Daily Value of sodium per serving.
- Use fresh poultry, fish and lean meat, rather than canned, smoked or processed.
- Choose fresh or frozen vegetables that have no added salt.
- Rinse canned foods to remove some of the sodium

Salt is essential to our body's fluids. The chemical name for dietary salt, or table salt, is sodium chloride. Since 90% of the sodium we ingest is from salt, it's difficult to separate the effects of salt and sodium in many studies. However, it's the sodium part most doctors focus on.

"The best known effect of sodium on health is the relationship between sodium and blood pressure," explains Dr. Catherine Loria of the National Institutes of Health's National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI). Dozens of studies, in both animals and people, have shown that a higher salt intake raises blood pressure. Reducing salt intake, on the other hand, lowers blood pressure.

## What You Need To Know About Blood Pressure

Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing against the walls of arteries as the heart pumps out blood. When this pressure rises—a condition called high blood pressure, or hypertension—it can damage the body in many ways over time. High blood pressure has been linked to heart disease, stroke, kidney failure and other health problems.

There are 2 blood pressure numbers, and they're usually written with one above or before the other. Systolic, the first, is the pressure when the heart beats, pumping blood through the arteries. Diastolic is the pressure when the heart is at rest between beats. The numbers 120/80 mmHg are the ones you should aim to keep your blood pressure below.

Some research also suggests that excessive salt intake might increase the risk of stomach cancer. Scientists continue to investigate this possible connection.

Researchers do know that not everyone is equally sensitive to salt. "From our experiments, we know there's lots of variation in the blood pressure response," Loria says. Certain groups of people see greater

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reductions in blood pressure when they lower their salt intake: African-Americans, older people and people with blood pressure above normal.

### Daily Recommendations For Sodium

Experts recommend that people take in less than 2,400 milligrams of sodium a day—that's what's in about 6 grams of salt, or about a teaspoon. People with high blood pressure should shoot for 1,500 milligrams or less—about 3.7 grams of salt. But right now, the average man in the United States takes in over 10 grams of salt per day and the average woman over 7.

Dr. Kirsten Bibbins-Domingo at the University of California, San Francisco, recently led an NIH-funded study that used computer modeling to explore the effects of a modest reduction in salt intake in the United States. The researchers found that reducing salt intake by 3 grams per day could cut the number of new cases of heart disease each year by as many as 120,000, stroke by 66,000 and heart attack by nearly 100,000. It could also prevent up to 92,000 deaths each year. All segments of the population would benefit, with African-Americans having the greatest improvements overall. Women would particularly benefit from reductions in stroke, older adults from a decline in heart disease and younger adults from fewer deaths.

### The Real Sources Of Salt Consumption

The salt we sprinkle on our food actually accounts for less than 10% of our salt consumption. Most of the salt we eat salt comes in processed foods from stores, restaurants and dining halls. You may already know that fast food, cold cuts and canned foods tend to have a lot of salt.

“Many people don't realize that a lot of our salt is from breads and cereals,” Bibbins-Domingo says. Studies have found that over 20% of the salt in the average American's diet comes from grain products, such as breads, cereals, crackers and chips.

“In terms of advice, I think the best guidance we have is for people to pay attention to nutrition facts on the labels,” Loria says. “The percent daily value is a better guide than the language that's used on food labels like ‘low-salt.’ These labels can be confusing because they have very defined technical meanings.” Try to select foods, she advises, with less than 5% of the daily value of salt per serving.

Even small reductions can have an effect on your blood pressure. If you can't find a low-salt alternative to a particular food, it still helps to pick something that's lower than what you're already consuming.

Why not start now? Make small changes at first, and then keep working to gradually lower your family's salt intake.

Amount Per Serving		Calories from Fat 110	
Calories 250		% Daily Value*	
<b>Total Fat</b> 12g			18%
Saturated Fat 3g			15%
Trans Fat 3g			
<b>Cholesterol</b> 30mg			10%
<b>Sodium</b> 470mg			20%
<b>Potassium</b> 700mg			20%
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 31g			10%
Dietary Fiber 0g			0%
Sugars 5g			
<b>Protein</b> 5g			
Vitamin A			4%
Vitamin C			2%
Calcium			20%
Iron			4%

\*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your Daily Values may be higher or lower depending on your calories needs:

	Calories:	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Sat Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g