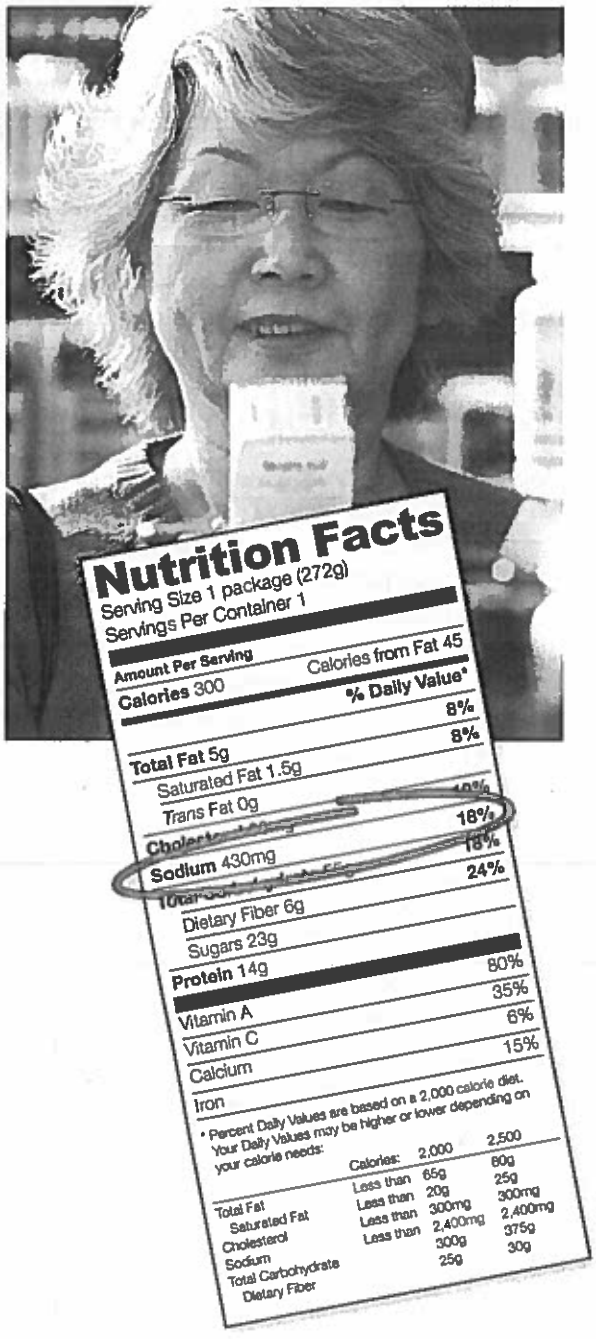
FACTS

From the U.S. Food and Drug Administration

Sodium in Your Diet

Use the Nutrition Facts Label and Reduce Your Intake



You've probably heard that most Americans eat too much sodium, and too much sodium can raise blood pressure – which can have serious health consequences if not treated.

Despite what many people think, use of the salt shaker is *not* the main cause of too much sodium in your diet. In fact, about 75% of dietary sodium comes from eating packaged and restaurant foods, whereas only a small portion (11%) comes from salt added to food when cooking or eating. But, even though sodium is already *in* these foods when you purchase them, there are still some steps you *can* follow to lower your daily sodium intake.

Look at the Label!

Packaged foods and beverages can contain high levels of sodium, whether or not they *taste* salty. That's why it's important to use the Nutrition Facts Label to check the sodium content.

- **Understand the Daily Value.** The Daily Values are the amounts of nutrients recommended per day for Americans 4 years of age and older. The Daily Value for sodium is **less than 2,400 milligrams (mg) per day.**
- **Use the Percent Daily Value (%DV) as a tool.** The %DV tells you how much of a nutrient is in one serving of a food. The %DV is based on 100% of the Daily Value for sodium. When comparing and choosing foods, pick the food with a lower %DV of sodium. As a general rule:

  5% DV or less of sodium per serving is low
  20% DV or more of sodium per serving is high

- **Pay attention to serving sizes.** The %DV listed is for one serving, but one package may contain more than one serving. Be sure to look at the serving size to determine how many servings you are actually consuming. For example, if a package contains *two servings* and you eat the entire package, you are consuming *twice the amount* of sodium listed on the label.

NOTE: FDA has issued final changes to update the Nutrition Facts label for packaged foods. For more information, see Changes to the Nutrition Facts Label at http://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/GuidanceDocumentsRegulatoryInformation/LabelingNutrition/ucm385663.htm.

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Food Choices Matter!

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), almost half of the sodium consumed by Americans comes from the following foods, many of which are commercially processed or prepared:

- Breads and rolls
- Cheese (natural and processed)
- Cold cuts and cured meats (such as deli or packaged ham or turkey)
- Mixed meat dishes (such as beef stew, chili, and meat loaf)
- Mixed pasta dishes (such as lasagna, pasta salad, and spaghetti with meat sauce)
- Pizza
- Poultry (fresh and processed)
- Sandwiches (such as hamburgers, hot dogs, and submarine sandwiches)
- Savory snacks (such as chips, crackers, popcorn, and pretzels)
- Soups

But remember, the sodium content can vary significantly between similar types of foods. So, use the Nutrition Facts Label to compare the amount of sodium in different foods and beverages, and select products that are lower in sodium. And, don't forget to check the serving size when comparing products in order to make an accurate comparison.

Salt and Sodium: Defined

The words "salt" and "sodium" are often used interchangeably, but they do not mean the same thing. Salt (also known by its chemical name, *sodium chloride*) is a crystal-like compound that is abundant in nature and is used to flavor and preserve food. Sodium is a mineral, and one of the *chemical elements* found in salt.

Sodium as a Food Ingredient

As a food ingredient, sodium has multiple uses, such as for curing meat, baking, thickening, retaining moisture, enhancing flavor (including the flavor of other ingredients), and as a preservative. Some common food additives – like monosodium glutamate (MSG), sodium bicarbonate (baking soda), sodium nitrite, and sodium benzoate – also contain sodium and contribute (in lesser amounts) to the total amount of "sodium" listed on the Nutrition Facts Label.

Surprisingly, some foods that don't taste salty can still be high in sodium, which is why using taste alone is not an accurate way to judge a food's sodium content. For example, while some foods that are high in sodium (like pickles and soy sauce) *taste* salty, there are also many foods (like cereals and pastries) that contain sodium but *don't* taste salty. Also, some foods that you may eat several times a day (such as breads) can add up to a lot of sodium over the course of a day, even though an individual serving may not be high in sodium.

Check the Package for Nutrient Claims

You can also check for nutrient claims on food and beverage packages to quickly identify those that may contain less sodium. Here's a guide to common claims and what they mean:

What It Says	What It Means
Salt/Sodium-Free	Less than 5 mg of sodium per serving
Very Low Sodium	35 mg of sodium or less per serving
Low Sodium	140 mg of sodium or less per serving
Reduced Sodium	At least 25% less sodium than the regular product
Light in Sodium or Lightly Salted	At least 50% less sodium than the regular product
No-Salt-Added or Unsalted	No salt is added during processing – but these products may not be salt/sodium-free unless stated

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Sodium and Blood Pressure

Sodium attracts water, and a high-sodium diet draws water into the bloodstream, which can increase the volume of blood and subsequently your blood pressure. **High blood pressure** (also known as **hypertension**) is a condition in which blood pressure remains elevated over time. Hypertension makes the heart work harder, and the high force of the blood flow can harm arteries and organs (such as the heart, kidneys, brain, and eyes).

And since blood pressure normally rises with age, limiting your sodium intake becomes even more important each year. The good news is that eating less sodium can help lower blood pressure, which in turn, can help reduce your risk of developing these serious medical conditions.

Potassium Helps!

Did you know that sodium and potassium both affect blood pressure? Eating enough potassium each day can help lower blood pressure by balancing out some of the harmful effects that sodium can have on blood pressure. Look for foods rich in potassium, such as bananas, beet greens, juices (carrot, orange, pomegranate, and prune), yogurt (non-fat and low-fat), potatoes, spinach, sweet potatoes, tomatoes and tomato products, and white beans.

Note: Food manufacturers may *voluntarily* list the Percent Daily Value (%DV) of potassium per serving on the Nutrition Facts Label, but they are *required to* list potassium if a statement is made on the package labeling about its health effects or the amount contained in the food (for example, "high" or "low").

Health Facts

- Approximately 56% of adults in the U.S. (ages 18 years and older) have either hypertension or prehypertension (blood pressure that is higher than normal, but not high enough to be defined as hypertension).
- Approximately 10% of children in the U.S. (ages 8 to 17 years old) have either hypertension or prehypertension.
- Hypertension can lead to heart attacks, heart failure, stroke, kidney disease, and blindness.

Know Your Numbers

Sodium is an essential nutrient and is needed by the body in relatively *small amounts* (provided that substantial sweating does not occur) to maintain a balance of body fluids and keep muscles and nerves running smoothly. However, most Americans eat too much of it – and they may not even know it.

Americans eat on average over **3,400 mg of sodium per day**, with intakes generally higher for men than women. However, the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommends that adults and children ages 14 years and older limit sodium intake to **less than 2,300 mg per day** – that's equal to about **1 teaspoon of salt!**

Adults with hypertension and prehypertension should further reduce their sodium intake to **1,500 mg per day**, which can result in even greater blood pressure reduction. So, talk to your healthcare provider about whether *you* are at risk for high blood pressure, and use the Nutrition Facts Label as your tool to evaluate how much sodium you are eating and drinking. In addition, adults who would benefit from blood pressure lowering should combine lower sodium intake with the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) eating plan (see http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/dash).

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10 Easy Tips For Reducing Sodium Consumption

Learning about sodium in foods and exploring new ways to prepare foods can help you achieve your sodium goal. And, if you follow these tips to reduce the amount of sodium you consume, your "taste" for sodium will gradually decrease over time – so eventually, you may not even miss it!

1. Read the Nutrition Facts Label

   Read the Nutrition Facts Label to see how much sodium is in foods and beverages. Most people should consume less than 100% of the Daily Value (or less than 2,400 mg) of sodium each day. Check the label to compare sodium in different brands of foods and beverages and choose those lower in sodium.

2. Prepare your own food when you can

   Limit packaged sauces, mixes, and "instant" products (including flavored rice, instant noodles, and ready-made pasta).

3. Add flavor without adding sodium

   Limit the amount of salt you add to foods when cooking, baking, or at the table. Try no-salt seasoning blends and herbs and spices instead of salt to add flavor to your food.

4. Buy fresh

   Choose fresh meat, poultry, and seafood, rather than processed varieties. Also, check the package on fresh meat and poultry to see if salt water or saline has been added.

5. Watch your veggies

   Buy fresh, frozen (no sauce or seasoning), or low sodium or no-salt-added canned vegetables.

6. Give sodium the "rinse"

   Rinse sodium-containing canned foods, such as beans, tuna, and vegetables before eating. This removes some of the sodium.

7. "Unsalt" your snacks

   Choose low sodium or no-salt-added nuts, seeds, and snack products (such as chips and pretzels) – or have carrot or celery sticks instead.

8. Consider your condiments

   Sodium in condiments can add up. Choose light or reduced sodium condiments, add oil and vinegar to salads rather than bottled dressings, and use only a small amount of seasoning from flavoring packets instead of the entire packet.

9. Reduce your portion size

   Less food means less sodium. Prepare smaller portions at home and consume less when eating out — choose smaller sizes, split an entrée with a friend, or take home part of your meal.

10. Make lower-sodium choices at restaurants

    Ask for your meal to be prepared without salt and request that sauces and salad dressings be served "on the side," then use less of them. If a restaurant item or meal includes a claim about its nutrient content, such as "low sodium" or "low fat," then nutrition information to support that claim is required to be available at the point of purchase.

    In addition, as of May 5, 2017, many chain restaurants (and other places selling restaurant-type food) will be required to provide written information on the nutrient content of standard menu items, including the amount of sodium. In the meantime you can also ask to see nutrition information (available in many chain restaurants) and then choose options that are lower in sodium.

For more information, contact the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition's Food and Cosmetic Information Center at **1-888-SAFEFOOD** (toll free), Monday through Friday 10 AM to 4 PM ET (except Thursdays from 12:30 PM to 1:30 PM ET and Federal holidays). Or, visit the FDA website at **http://www.fda.gov/educationresourcelibrary**

DIETARY GUIDELINES FOR AMERICANS 2015-2020 EIGHTH EDITION

Cut Down on Sodium

Get the facts about sodium and salt from the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. Limiting sodium — by eating out less and making smart choices at the grocery store — can have health benefits.

What is sodium?

Sodium is a mineral, and most of the sodium in our foods comes from salt. We all need a little sodium to stay healthy.

Eating too much sodium can lead to high blood pressure (hypertension). High blood pressure can raise your risk of having a heart attack or stroke.

The good news is that cutting down on sodium can help lower your blood pressure or keep it at a healthy level.

What foods are high in sodium?

Whenever you add salt to your food, you're adding sodium. But the *Dietary Guidelines* shows that most of the sodium we eat doesn't come from our saltshakers. Sodium is used by food manufacturers and others who prepare foods as a preservative and to add flavor, cure meat, thicken sauces, and keep some foods moist. That's why sodium is found in almost all of the processed and prepared foods we buy.

Dishes with many ingredients — like pizza, casseroles, burgers, tacos, and sandwiches — tend to have ingredients that are high in sodium. When making these dishes, limit ingredients that are often high in sodium:

- Processed meats, poultry, and seafood — like deli meats, sausages, pepperoni, and sardines
- Sauces, dressings, and condiments
- Instant products like flavored rice, instant noodles, and ready-made pasta

Keep in mind that even foods that don't taste salty may still be adding sodium to your diet, especially if you eat them often. For example, the sodium found in foods like breads and tortillas, cheese, and condiments can add up.

Key Recommendations: Sodium

Age range	Amount of sodium
Adults* and children 14 years and older	Less than 2,300 mg a day
Children ages 9 to 13	Less than 2,200 mg a day
Children ages 4 to 8	Less than 1,900 mg a day
Children ages 2 to 3	Less than 1,500 mg a day

*Adults without hypertension or prehypertension

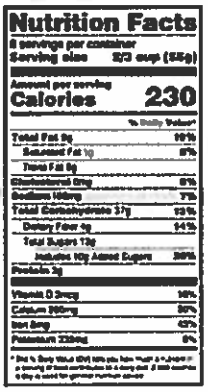
Adults with hypertension or prehypertension can lower their blood pressure even more by limiting sodium intake to 1,500 mg a day.

Sodium and salt — what's the difference?

Since most sodium in our foods comes from salt, people use the 2 words as if they're the same thing. They're actually a little different. Sodium is a mineral that's **in** salt. Salt is also known as *sodium* chloride.

How can I cut down on sodium?

Pay close attention to the foods you choose when you're grocery shopping and eating out. Try making these 5 small changes.



1. **Check the Nutrition Facts label.** Before you buy a food or drink, look for the amount of sodium on the Nutrition Facts label. Compare different options and choose the one with the lowest amount.

   You can also look out for foods that are labeled low-sodium, reduced sodium, or no-salt-added. But keep in mind that sometimes foods without these labels are still lower in sodium — so it's always a good idea to check the Nutrition Facts label.

Two slices of thick-crust pizza with pepperoni add up to about 2,270 mg of sodium — almost the daily recommended sodium limit for adults and children 14 years and up!

2. **Find out which foods you eat have the most sodium.** You can use the USDA's SuperTracker (https://supertracker.usda.gov) to get an idea. For dishes higher in sodium, consider eating smaller portions or eating them less often.

3. **Make healthy *shifts*.** Replace higher-sodium foods or ingredients with healthier options. You can:

Snack on unsalted nuts instead of snacks like salted pretzels

Choose fresh skinless chicken and turkey, lean meats, and seafood instead of processed deli meats or sausages

Go for fresh, frozen vegetables without sauce, and canned vegetables with the least amount of sodium

When eating out, you can:

- Ask for the written nutrition information and look for items that are lower in sodium
- Get dressings and sauces on the side — and add only the amount you need to your meal
- Ask to have no salt added to your food

4. **Cook more at home.** Making your own meals — instead of eating at restaurants or buying packaged foods — is a great way to eat less sodium because you're in control. To add flavor, use spices instead of salt or packaged sauces and mixes.

5. **Consider the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) eating plan.** Based on scientific evidence, the DASH plan helps limit sodium and unhealthy fats. Think about following the DASH eating plan at the lower-sodium option of 1,500 mg per day if you have hypertension or prehypertension. Learn more about it at http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/dash.

There are lots of different types of salt: table salt, kosher salt, sea salt, Himalayan salt, and more. To lower the sodium in your diet, you need to cut down on **all** types of salt, including salt already in foods.

Want to learn more about sodium and how to find a healthy eating pattern that works for you or your family? Check out DietaryGuidelines.gov for more information on the *Dietary Guidelines* and ChooseMyPlate.gov for online tools, recipes, and more.

Use Herbs and Spices Instead of Salt

Try these herbs and spices to season your food instead of salt.
Start with small amounts to see if you like them.

- **Allspice:** Use in meats, fish, poultry, soups, stews, and desserts.
- **Anise:** Use in breads, snacks, soups, stews, vegetables, meats, and poultry.
- **Annatto Seeds:** Use in vegetables, meats, poultry, and rice.
- **Bay Leaf:** Use in soups, stews, meats, poultry, seafood, and sauces.
- **Basil:** Use in soups, salads, vegetables, fish, and meats.
- **Cayenne Pepper:** Use in meats, poultry, stews, and sauces.

- **Celery Seed:** Use in fish, salads, dressings, and vegetables.
- **Chili Powder / Chile Pequeño:** Use in meats, poultry, vegetable, fish and stews.
- **Cilantro:** Use in meats, sauces, stews, and rice.
- **Cinnamon:** Use in salads, vegetables, breads, and snacks.
- **Clove:** Use in soups, salads, and vegetables.
- **Cumin:** Use in meats and poultry.
- **Curry Powder:** Use in meats, shellfish, and vegetables.
- **Dill Weed and Dill Seed:** Use in fish, soups, salads, and vegetables.
- **Garlic:** Use in soups, stews, salads, vegetables, meats, poultry, seafood, and sauces.
- **Garlic Powder:** Use in meats, poultry, fish, vegetables, salads, soups, and stews.
- **Ginger:** Use in soups, salads, vegetables, and meats.
- **Lemongrass:** Use in soups, stews, meats, poultry, seafood, and sauces.
- **Marjoram:** Use in soups, salads, vegetables, beef, fish, and poultry.
- **Nutmeg:** Use in vegetables and meats.
- **Onion Powder/Green Onion:** Use in meats, poultry, seafood, soups, and salads.
- **Oregano:** Use in soups, salads, vegetables, meats, and poultry.
- **Paprika:** Use in meats, fish, poultry, and vegetables.
- **Parsley:** Use in salads, vegetables, fish, and meats.

- **Rosemary:** Use in salads, vegetables, fish, and meats.
- **Saffron:** Use in breads, snacks, soups, stews, poultry, seafood, sauces, and rice.
- **Sage:** Use in soups, salads, vegetables, meats, and poultry.
- **Tamarind:** Use in soups, poultry, sauces, and rice.
- **Thyme:** Use in salads, vegetables, fish, and poultry.
- **Vinegar:** Use in soups, salads, vegetables, meats, and poultry.

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute
December 2013
COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKER HEALTH DISPARITIES INITIATIVE