

Salt and High Blood Pressure

Salt and Sodium

Table salt is made up of two minerals – sodium and chloride, therefore if you use the salt shaker at the table or when cooking you are getting some sodium. Most of our dietary sodium is obtained from the salt and sodium additives used in the processed foods we buy. If you look at the ingredient list of packaged foods, even those that don't taste salty, you will often see several sodium additives. Most people consume two or even three times the recommended amount of sodium without even realizing it.

Adequate Sodium Intake

Experts agree that an adequate sodium intake for most adults is **1500 mg/day** or approximately two-thirds of a teaspoon of table salt. We need small amounts of sodium for healthy functioning, such as maintaining a proper fluid balance in the body.

Maximum Sodium Intake

The maximum amount of sodium we should consume a day is **2300 mg** which is equal to approximately 1 teaspoon of table salt. This is not a goal, but rather a limit and, in fact, the lower your salt intake the better. Excess dietary sodium can increase the amount of blood in your arteries, raising blood pressure and increasing the risk of heart disease and stroke.

Recommendations for adequate sodium intake by age

Age	Sodium Intake/Day (mg)
0-6 months	120
7-12 months	370
1-3 years	1000
4-8 years	1,200
9-50 years	1,500
50-70 years	1,300
> 70 years	1,200

Source: Panel for Dietary Intakes for Electrolytes and Water, Standing Committee on the Scientific Evaluation of Dietary Reference Intakes. Dietary reference intakes for water, potassium, sodium, chloride, and sulphate. Washington (DC) Institute of Medicine: 2004.



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Equivalent measurements of sodium & salt

Sodium (mg)	Sodium (mmol)	Salt (g)
500	22	1.25
1,500	65	3.75
2,000	87	5.0
2,300	100	5.8
2,400	104	6.0
3,000	130	7.5
4,000	174	10

Source: Panel for Dietary Intakes for Electrolytes and Water, Standing Committee on the Scientific Evaluation of Dietary Reference Intakes. Dietary reference intakes for water, potassium, sodium, chloride, and sulphate. Washington (DC)

Foods High in Sodium Content

The salt shaker contributes only about 10% of total sodium consumption. Most sodium is obtained from processed foods, including fast foods, prepared meals, processed meats such as hot dogs and lunchmeats, canned soups, bottled dressings, packaged sauces, condiments such as ketchup and pickles, and salty snacks like potato chips.

How to Reduce Sodium Intake

Check the Nutrition Facts table on food products for sodium or salt. If the daily value of sodium listed in the table is 10% or less per serving or the amount of sodium is 200 mg or less per serving, the product is considered low in salt. To help reduce added, unnecessary salt:

- Cut down on prepared and processed foods
- Eat more fresh vegetables and fruit
- Reduce the amount of salt used in cooking, baking and at the table
- Use condiments sparingly and experiment with other seasonings, such as garlic, lemon juice and fresh or dried herbs
- Avoid using commercially softened water for drinking or cooking
- Limit how often you eat in restaurants.
- Restrict fast foods and take-out meals.
- Use oil, rather than butter or margarine for cooking.
- Limit “instant” foods or convenience foods (ie. canned soups, TV dinners)

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- Buy pre-prepared foods that are low in sodium such as frozen vegetables and pre-cut salad.
- Plan meals at least a day in advance. Find quick meal ideas in cookbooks and on-line.
- Read food labels. Look for foods labelled salt-free, no added salt, low in sodium, or reduced in sodium.
- Look for unsalted snack foods such as chips, pretzels, nuts, and crackers.
- Use herbs and spices on popcorn instead of butter and salt.

For more tips on how to reduce salt from your diet, visit the following web sites: www.heartandstroke.ca, www.lowersodium.ca www.sodium101.ca

Sources:

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Panel for Dietary Intakes for Electrolytes and Water, Standing Committee on the Scientific Evaluation of Dietary Reference Intakes. Dietary reference intakes for water, potassium, sodium, chloride, and sulphate. Washington (DC)