Sodium: the facts

Americans consume too much sodium. High sodium consumption raises 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 fourth 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—as sodium intake increases, so does blood pressure for most people.[1]
- When salt intake is reduced, blood pressure begins decreasing 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.[1,4]

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 in place of each other. For example, the Nutrition Facts label uses "sodium," whereas the front of the package may say "low salt."[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 *2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommend limiting sodium to less than 2,300 milligrams (mg) per day. Individuals who are 51 years and older and those of any age, including children, who are African American or have high blood pressure, diabetes, or chronic kidney disease should limit intake to 1,500 mg of sodium per day. These specific populations account for about half of the U.S. population and the majority of adults.[6]
- The average daily sodium intake for Americans age 2 years and older is more than 3,400 mg.[7]
- Most of the sodium we eat comes from processed foods and foods prepared in restaurants. When sodium is added to processed foods, it cannot be removed. More than 40% of sodium intake comes from the following 10 types of foods[8]:

  1. Breads and rolls
  2. Cold cuts and cured meats such as deli or packaged ham or turkey
  3. Pizza
  4. Fresh and processed poultry
  5. Soups
  6. Sandwiches such as cheeseburgers
  7. Cheese
  8. Pasta dishes (not including macaroni and cheese)
  9. Meat-mixed dishes such as meat loaf with tomato sauce
  10. Snacks such as chips, pretzels, and popcorn

- Decreasing personal sodium intake can be hard, even for motivated persons.
- Sodium content can vary significantly within food categories. For example, sodium in chicken noodle soup can vary by as much as 840 mg per serving.[8]
- Consumers typically underestimate the sodium content of restaurant foods.[9] With forthcoming implementation of national menu labeling, information on sodium and other key nutrients will be made available upon request.[10]

National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion
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Reducing sodium, reducing cardiovascular disease burden

- A reduction of 25% in sodium content across the top 10 food category contributors to sodium consumption could result in an 11% reduction (approximately 360 mg) in total daily mean sodium consumption in the United States.[8]
- Excess sodium intake contributes to high rates of high blood pressure, heart attack, and stroke. Reducing average population sodium consumption by 400 mg has been projected to avert up to 28,000 deaths from any cause and save $7 billion in health care expenditures annually.[11]

Other potential benefits of reduced sodium consumption that need further research[1]

- Reduced risk of gastro-esophageal cancer.
- Reduced left ventricular mass.
- Preserved bone mass.

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