

Sodium Facts to Consider

Is Sodium the Same Thing as Salt? Sodium is a mineral found in many foods. Your body needs sodium for normal muscle and nerve functions. It also helps keep body fluids in balance. Most table salts are made from sodium chloride, so salt used when preparing or flavoring foods usually contains sodium. Health care providers often use the words sodium and salt interchangeably.

Is Sodium Bad? Though you need some sodium, too much may be bad for your health. Regularly eating high-sodium foods can cause your body to retain excess water, which can make your organs have to work harder. This increases your risk for high blood pressure, which can harm your heart and kidney function.

How Much Sodium Do You Need? An adequate intake of 1,500 milligrams of sodium per day has been established for adults, but most people consume more than that amount. The typical American diet contains more than 3,400 milligrams of sodium. Most of that sodium comes from packaged convenience foods. Adding more salt at the table adds to high intakes of sodium — 1 teaspoon of salt has 2,300 milligrams of sodium. If you consume more than 2,300 milligrams of sodium per day, the current health recommendation is to cut back on your daily intake of sodium. Even if you take medicine for high blood pressure, you still need to watch how much sodium you eat.

What Foods are High in Sodium? Some foods naturally contain sodium. Others have added salt, and usually contain higher amounts of sodium, so check the Nutrition Facts label to look for foods that are lower in sodium.

- ❖ Choose foods with less than 120 milligrams of sodium per serving.
- ❖ Look for the words salt-free, sodium-free, very low sodium and low sodium on the label.
- ❖ Double-check labels that read unsalted, no salt added, reduced sodium or lower sodium. These items may still be high in sodium.

Foods that Contribute the Most Salt

- Mixed dishes (including pizza, sandwiches, burgers, tacos etc.)
- Processed meats such as bacon, sausage, lunch meats and hot dogs
- Grains that include sauces or seasonings with salt
- Canned vegetables, soups and frozen dinners
- Snacks, including chips, pretzels and crackers
- Condiments (including salad dressings, ketchup, mustard etc.)

How to Limit Your Sodium Intake

- Include a variety of fruits and vegetables regularly
- For frozen products, look for ones without added sauces or sodium.
- If choosing canned vegetables, select low-sodium or no-salt-added items. You also can rinse and drain canned vegetables to help reduce the amount of salt.
- Limit your intake of highly processed foods by cooking more from scratch
- Skip the added salt by experimenting with spices, fresh herbs or sodium free seasoning blends

Reference: American Dietetic Association, www.eatright.org

The Nutrition Project is administered by Elder Services of Worcester Area, Inc. and receives Federal financial support under the Older Americans Act provided by Senior Connection and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs. Funders also include United Way of Central Massachusetts, Greater Worcester Community Foundation, City of Worcester's Department of Health and Human Services, Elder Affairs Commission Division, participant donations, grants, individual support and the Councils on Aging in Auburn, Barre, Boylston, Grafton, Hardwick/Gilbertville, Holden, Leicester, Millbury, Oakham, Paxton, Rutland, Shrewsbury, and West Boylston.