

# Sodium

According to the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, diets higher in sodium are associated with an increased risk of developing high blood pressure, which can raise the risk of heart attacks, heart failure, stroke, kidney disease, and blindness.

## What It Is

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. Sodium is a **mineral** and one of the **chemical elements found in salt**.

## Where It Is Found

Over 70% of dietary sodium comes from eating **packaged and prepared** foods, whereas only a small portion (about 11%) comes from salt added to food when cooking and eating.

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

- Breads and rolls
- Pizza
- Sandwiches (such as hamburgers, hot dogs, and submarine sandwiches)
- Cold cuts and cured meats (such as deli and packaged ham and turkey)
- Soups
- Burritos and tacos
- Snack foods (such as chips, crackers, microwave popcorn, and pretzels)
- Chicken (includes processed chicken)
- Cheese (includes processed cheese)
- Egg dishes and omelets

## What It Does

- Sodium is an essential nutrient that the human body needs in relatively small amounts (provided that substantial sweating does not occur).
- Sodium is important for many body processes, such as fluid balance, muscle contraction, and nervous system function.
- As a food ingredient, sodium has multiple uses, such as in curing meat, baking, thickening, retaining moisture, enhancing flavor (including the flavor of other ingredients), and as a preservative.

Nutrition Facts	
4 servings per container	
<b>Serving size 1 1/2 cup (208g)</b>	
<b>Amount per serving</b>	
<b>Calories</b>	<b>240</b>
<b>% Daily Value*</b>	
<b>Total Fat</b> 4g	<b>5%</b>
Saturated Fat 1.5g	<b>8%</b>
Trans Fat 0g	
<b>Cholesterol</b> 5mg	<b>2%</b>
<b>Sodium</b> 430mg	<b>19%</b>
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 46g	<b>17%</b>
Dietary Fiber 7g	<b>25%</b>
Total Sugars 4g	
Includes 2g Added Sugars	<b>4%</b>
<b>Protein</b> 11g	
Vitamin D 2mcg	10%
Calcium 260mg	20%
Iron 6mg	35%
Potassium 240mg	6%
<small>* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.</small>	

Sodium is a nutrient to get less of.



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## Health Facts

- Most Americans exceed the recommended limits for sodium in the diet. On average, Americans eat about 3,400 milligrams (mg) of sodium per day.
- According to the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, diets higher in sodium are associated with an **increased risk of developing high blood pressure** (also known as hypertension), a condition in which blood pressure remains elevated over time. High blood pressure makes the heart work harder, and the high force of the blood flow can harm arteries and organs, such as the heart, brain, kidneys, and eyes. Uncontrolled high blood pressure can raise the risk of heart attacks, heart failure, stroke, kidney disease, and blindness.
- The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommend **limiting sodium intake to less than 2,300 mg per day**—that's equal to about 1 teaspoon of salt!
- The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is working with the food industry to make reasonable reductions in sodium across a wide variety of foods so Americans have an easier time consuming less sodium if they want to.

## ✓ Action Steps

### For Reducing Sodium in Your Diet

Use the **Nutrition Facts** label as a tool for reducing consumption of sodium. The Nutrition Facts label on food and beverage packages shows the amount in milligrams (mg) and the % Daily Value (%DV) of sodium per serving of the food.

**The Daily Value for sodium is less than 2,300 mg per day.**

- Compare and choose foods to get less than 100% DV of sodium each day. And remember:
  - 5% DV or less of sodium per serving is considered low
  - 20% DV or more of sodium per serving is considered high
- Look for light, low sodium, reduced sodium, or no-salt-added versions of packaged foods.
- Prepare your own food when you can and limit packaged sauces and flavored products (such as rice and pasta mixes and instant noodles).
- Flavor foods with herbs and spices and no-salt seasoning blends instead of adding salt to foods when cooking, baking, and eating.
- Choose fresh meats, poultry, and seafood, rather than processed varieties. Also, check the package on fresh meats and poultry to see if salt water or saline has been added.
- Buy fresh, frozen (no sauce or seasoning), low sodium, or no-salt-added canned vegetables.
- Rinse sodium-containing canned foods, such as beans, tuna, and vegetables before eating.
- Try 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.
- Choose low sodium or no-salt-added nuts, seeds, and snack foods (such as chips and pretzels)—or have carrot or celery sticks instead.
- Consume smaller portions of foods and beverages that are higher in sodium or consume them less often.
- When eating out, ask that your meal be prepared without salt and request that sauces and salad dressings be served “on the side,” then use less of them. You can also ask if nutrition information is available and then choose options that are lower in sodium.