

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT SODIUM

What is the difference between *sodium* and *salt*?

Salt is a combination of the two minerals, sodium and chloride. Salt is comprised of 40% sodium and 60% chloride. One level teaspoon of salt contains approximately 2,400 milligrams (mg) of sodium.

How much sodium is in salt?

Salt is 40% sodium. Use this chart to help you remember how much sodium you are adding to food:

- 1/4 teaspoon salt 600 milligrams sodium
- 1/2 teaspoon salt 1,200 milligrams sodium
- 3/4 teaspoon salt 1,800 milligrams sodium
- 1 teaspoon salt 2,400 milligrams sodium

What is the difference between *kosher salt* and *sea salt*?

Kosher salt is not in itself kosher, but is used to make meat kosher according to Jewish law. Unlike table salt that is finely grained, kosher salt has a coarse texture. *Sea salt* is produced by the evaporation of seawater and receives little or no processing. It contains slightly less sodium than table salt and kosher salt because of the presence of many other trace elements. Many chefs prefer to use kosher salt and sea salt because of their flavor and texture.

What do the blood pressure numbers mean?

A blood pressure cuff measures two blood pressure numbers. A healthy blood pressure is at or below 120 "over" 80. The top number measures the pressure when your heart pumps blood throughout your body. This is called the *systolic* pressure. The bottom number measures the pressure between pumps, when your heart is at rest. This is called the *diastolic* pressure.

	Normal	Pre-hypertensive	Hypertensive
Systolic	120 (or below)	120-139	140 or above
Diastolic	80 (or below)	80-89	90 or above

What is the recommended daily limit of sodium for healthy adults?

The 2010 Dietary Guidelines recommend that a safe daily intake of sodium for healthy adults under the age of 51 years is 2,300 mg, which is equivalent to about 1 teaspoon of salt. For adults who are 51 and older and those of any age who are African American or have hypertension, diabetes or chronic kidney disease, the recommended daily sodium limit is only 1,500 mg, which is about half a teaspoon of salt. This applies to about half of the population, including children, and the majority of adults. The American Heart Association's January 2010 recommendations are more stringent and recommend that all Americans reduce the amount of sodium in their diet to less than 1500 mg a day.

When is an individual food item considered to be "low sodium"?

Low sodium foods have 140 mg or less per serving, according to USDA Dietary Guidelines, 2005.

Why should I eat less processed foods if I am concerned about my blood pressure?

Processing foods generally increases their amount of sodium and decreases their amount of potassium. You can optimize your potassium intake and reduce your sodium intake by avoiding processed foods and eating more fresh fruits and vegetables and whole grains.



What is the relationship between sodium and potassium?

Sodium and potassium are examples of common electrolytes found in food and our bodies. Electrolytes are particles that work together to maintain the amount of fluid inside and outside of the cells. This is called fluid balance and proper function of the body requires that fluid balance be maintained. Under normal conditions, there is more sodium outside the cell and more potassium inside the cell. When these electrolytes are in balance, then fluid balance is maintained and blood pressure is regulated. Eating a diet that balances sodium and potassium is achieved by reducing sodium-rich processed foods, and increasing potassium rich foods like whole grains, fruits, and vegetables.

Does everyone need to cut back on salt? Or are only some people “salt sensitive”?

Most adults would benefit from cutting back on their salt intake. There is no easy way to screen for people with health risks due to a high-salt diet. A large percentage of adults will develop high blood pressure at some point in their lives, which can start in childhood and progress steadily over time. It is smart to take steps in childhood to prevent this. Becoming accustomed to a high-salt taste early in life will make it much more difficult to cut back on sodium later in life, especially when surrounded by high-sodium foods.

Do you recommend using low-sodium products?

While many processed foods contain large amounts of added sodium, sodium is also found naturally in many everyday foods. Because sodium is so common in foods, it is easy to consume excess amounts in our regular diet. It is recommended that when eating processed foods, such as canned soups and beans, vegetable juices, and pre-packaged rice and pasta dishes, to look for labels with the words “low-sodium” as these foods are lower in sodium. Rinsing canned beans is also recommended to reduce the amount of sodium.

Are all salt-substitutes safe for all people?

Most salt-substitutes are made from potassium chloride which contains relatively high amounts of potassium. Most people can tolerate extra potassium, and actually need more of this mineral. But extra potassium can be dangerous for people who have trouble getting rid of any excess potassium or those people who are taking medications that can increase potassium levels. This includes people with diabetes, kidney disease, those who have had a blocked urinary flow, or those taking a potassium-sparing diuretic, an ACE inhibitor, or an angiotensin-receptor blocker. Check with your doctor before trying a potassium-based salt substitute.

Can I eat pork and other meats if I am concerned about my sodium intake?

Fresh pork and other meats are generally low in sodium and are fine to eat when watching your sodium intake. Cured and processed meats, such as ham, bacon, salami, beef jerky, and deli-style meats are generally high in sodium and low in potassium. Strive to eat fresh meats and less processed foods to decrease your daily sodium intake.

What diet would you recommend that would help me limit my sodium intake?

A diet that focuses on fresh foods – fresh fruits and vegetables, lean meats, and whole grains - and one that limits the amount of prepared, processed, and fast foods will help you reduce your sodium intake. Fresh fruits and vegetables are generally low in sodium and high in potassium, so they are twice as good. In addition, focusing on having smaller portions of foods, seeking low-salt options, and seasoning your fresh foods with sodium-free herbs, spices, and citrus will help you limit your sodium intake.