

KEEPING AN EYE ON: Sodium



Maintaining a healthy blood pressure level is important for keeping your heart healthy. Sodium in our diet may affect our blood pressure, and when we eat too much of it, we retain fluids, making our heart work harder to pump blood through our system.

Current dietary guidelines say most adults should consume at most 1500-2300mg of sodium per day (that's 2/3 teaspoon to 1 teaspoon of salt). But many of us eat twice that amount without even realizing it. According to the American Heart Association, about 12% of the sodium in our diet comes from the fresh foods we eat - fruits, vegetables, lean protein, nuts and seeds; 75% comes from processed foods, such as deli meats, frozen dinners, and salted snacks, and the remaining 13% comes from salt that we add during cooking or at the table.

Sodium in the diet:



Nutrition Facts Panel

Be sure to check the Nutrition Facts Panel on packaged foods so you'll know just how much salt is in each serving. Check different brands of similar foods and compare sodium levels as one brand may be lower than the others.

Ingredient List

Check the Ingredient List, too. Words such as soda (which is sodium bicarbonate or baking soda); sodium, sodium nitrate, sodium citrate, salt, monosodium glutamate [MSG] and sodium benzoate, tell you that the product contains sodium.

Fresh Foods and Cooking

Eating a balanced diet filled with fresh foods and cooking at home can help decrease your sodium intake. When stocking your pantry, look for items that are low in sodium and sugar (or better yet, no sodium or sugar). Canned beans are a great heart-healthy staple to keep on hand. If you can't find a low-sodium version at your store, you can reduce the amount of the sodium by up to 40% when you rinse and drain the beans thoroughly before using them.

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Food with Excess Sodium

The foods below contribute the most to excess sodium in our diets, so read labels carefully and watch portion size, or eat these less frequently. Some processed soups and restaurant dishes can contain half- or even a full-day's sodium in one serving!

- Commercial breads and rolls
- Cheese
- Cold cuts and cured meats
- Meat

While fresh beef, pork, chicken and turkey are naturally low in sodium, many processors sell “enhanced” products which are essentially marinated in salt water.

- Pizza
- Processed soups
- Processed snack foods
- Restaurant food

Restaurants often add much more salt and fat to their foods than you would at home. Here are a few strategies when eating out:

- > Let your server know you'd like low-sodium choices and ask for recommendations
- > Select grilled rather than fried foods
- > Order foods without cheese toppings
- > Ask for condiments and salad dressings on the side
- > Consider sharing your entrée with your fellow diner, and have a salad as a side

