

Sodium and Blood Pressure

Sodium attracts water, and a high-sodium diet draws water into the bloodstream, which can increase the volume of blood and subsequently your blood pressure. **High blood pressure** (also known as **hypertension**) is a condition in which blood pressure remains elevated over time. Hypertension makes the heart work harder, and the high force of the blood flow can harm arteries and organs (such as the heart, kidneys, brain, and eyes).

And since blood pressure normally rises with age, limiting your sodium intake becomes even more important each year. The good news is that eating less sodium can help lower blood pressure, which in turn, can help reduce your risk of developing these serious medical conditions.

Potassium Helps!

Did you know that sodium and potassium both affect blood pressure? Eating enough potassium each day can help lower blood pressure by balancing out some of the harmful effects that sodium can have on blood pressure. Look for foods rich in potassium, such as bananas, beet greens, juices (carrot, orange, pomegranate, and prune), yogurt (non-fat and low-fat), potatoes, spinach, sweet potatoes, tomatoes and tomato products, and white beans.

Note: Food manufacturers may *voluntarily* list the Percent Daily Value (%DV) of potassium per serving on the Nutrition Facts Label, but they are *required* to list potassium if a statement is made on the package labeling about its health effects or the amount contained in the food (for example, “high” or “low”).



Health Facts

- Approximately 56% of adults in the U.S. (ages 18 years and older) have either hypertension or prehypertension (blood pressure that is higher than normal, but not high enough to be defined as hypertension).
- Approximately 10% of children in the U.S. (ages 8 to 17 years old) have either hypertension or prehypertension.
- Hypertension can lead to heart attacks, heart failure, stroke, kidney disease, and blindness.

Know Your Numbers

Sodium is an essential nutrient and is needed by the body in relatively *small amounts* (provided that substantial sweating does not occur) to maintain a balance of body fluids and keep muscles and nerves running smoothly. However, most Americans eat too much of it – and they may not even know it.

Americans eat on average over **3,400 mg of sodium per day**, with intakes generally higher for men than women. However, the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommends that adults and children ages 14 years and older limit sodium intake to **less than 2,300 mg per day** – that’s equal to about **1 teaspoon of salt!**



Adults with hypertension and prehypertension should further reduce their sodium intake to **1,500 mg per day**, which can result in even greater blood pressure reduction. So, talk to your healthcare provider about whether *you* are at risk for high blood pressure, and use the Nutrition Facts Label as your tool to evaluate how much sodium you are eating and drinking. In addition, adults who would benefit from blood pressure lowering should combine lower sodium intake with the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) eating plan (see <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/dash>).

10 Easy Tips For Reducing Sodium Consumption

Learning about sodium in foods and exploring new ways to prepare foods can help you achieve your sodium goal. And, if you follow these tips to reduce the amount of sodium you consume, your “taste” for sodium will gradually decrease over time – so eventually, you may not even miss it!

1 Read the Nutrition Facts Label

Read the Nutrition Facts Label to see how much sodium is in foods and beverages. Most people should consume less than 100% of the Daily Value (or less than 2,400 mg) of sodium each day. Check the label to compare sodium in different brands of foods and beverages and choose those lower in sodium.

2 Prepare your own food when you can

Limit packaged sauces, mixes, and “instant” products (including flavored rice, instant noodles, and ready-made pasta).

3 Add flavor without adding sodium

Limit the amount of salt you add to foods when cooking, baking, or at the table. Try no-salt seasoning blends and herbs and spices instead of salt to add flavor to your food.

4 Buy fresh

Choose fresh meat, poultry, and seafood, rather than processed varieties. Also, check the package on fresh meat and poultry to see if salt water or saline has been added.

5 Watch your veggies

Buy fresh, frozen (no sauce or seasoning), or low sodium or no-salt-added canned vegetables.

6 Give sodium the “rinse”

Rinse sodium-containing canned foods, such as beans, tuna, and vegetables before eating. This removes some of the sodium.

7 “Unsalt” your snacks

Choose low sodium or no-salt-added nuts, seeds, and snack products (such as chips and pretzels) – or have carrot or celery sticks instead.

8 Consider your condiments

Sodium in condiments can add up. Choose 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.

9 Reduce your portion size

Less food means less sodium. Prepare smaller portions at home and consume less when eating out — choose smaller sizes, split an entrée with a friend, or take home part of your meal.

10 Make lower-sodium choices at restaurants

Ask for your meal to be prepared without salt and request that sauces and salad dressings be served “on the side,” then use less of them. If a restaurant item or meal includes a claim about its nutrient content, such as “low sodium” or “low fat,” then nutrition information to support that claim is required to be available at the point of purchase.

In addition, as of May 5, 2017, many chain restaurants (and other places selling restaurant-type food) will be required to provide written information on the nutrient content of standard menu items, including the amount of sodium. In the meantime you can also ask to see nutrition information (available in many chain restaurants) and then choose options that are lower in sodium.