

Sodium

A registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN) can help you set specific nutrition goals and guide you in planning a personalized healthy eating pattern.

To find an RDN in your area, visit “Find an Expert” at www.eatright.org



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Sodium—in small amounts—is important for good health. Our bodies use sodium to control blood pressure. Sodium also sends nerve signals, assists in muscle function, and helps maintain the body’s fluid balance. However, most Americans get more sodium than they need. Sodium in your diet comes mostly from salt, also known as sodium chloride.

What is the connection between sodium and blood pressure?

High blood pressure (also called hypertension) is linked to diets that are high in sodium and low in potassium. High blood pressure is a risk factor for heart disease, stroke, and kidney disease. However, a diet high in sodium is not the only risk factor for having high blood pressure; other reasons may include:

- older age
- family history of high blood pressure
- African American ancestry
- being overweight
- smoking



How much sodium do I need?

The *2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommends that children aged 14 and over and all adults limit sodium to less than 2,300 milligrams (mg) per day as part of a healthy eating pattern. This is about the amount of sodium in one level teaspoon of salt.

For adults who have high blood pressure or pre-hypertension (slightly elevated blood pressure), limiting sodium even more—to 1,500 mg per day—is recommended.

If you have high blood pressure and are taking medication for it, consuming less sodium may help your medication work better or may decrease the amount of medication you need to keep your blood pressure in a healthy range.

Where is the sodium in my diet coming from?

Sodium is found naturally in many foods, like vegetables and milk, but these amounts are very small compared to the sodium found in packaged foods and food prepared in restaurants. Salt and high-sodium ingredients are added to these foods for flavor, and to help preserve them. Even foods with low to moderate amounts of sodium can add up to high sodium intake if you consume them often. The sodium that comes from salt added during cooking or used at the table is likely much less than from other sources.

Some common foods that contribute the most sodium include:

- mixed foods, such as burgers, sandwiches, tacos, soups, pizza
- cured meats, deli meats/cold cuts
- poultry items, such as nuggets and fried chicken
- seasoned rice, pasta, and grain dishes
- condiments, gravies, sauces, spreads, salad dressings
- snacks such as chips, pretzels, and popcorn

