

# Salt in the Diet

## What is salt?

Salt used in the diet is a mineral called sodium chloride. Salt comes from seawater and from salt mines. Your body needs sodium to stay healthy.

- The cells of your body need sodium to work properly. Too little or too much sodium in your blood can affect brain, heart, nerve, and muscle cells.
- Sodium helps your body keep the right balance of fluids. The right fluid balance helps your body keep the right blood pressure, keeps you from losing too much fluid (dehydration), and keeps your kidneys healthy.

Too much salt in your diet can lead to too much sodium in the blood and cause health problems. For example:

- Your body may keep too much water. This may cause swelling of your hands, feet, and belly.
- Your blood pressure may get too high. High blood pressure increases your risk for heart disease and stroke.

## How much salt do I need?

The 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans say that you should eat no more than 1 teaspoon of salt, or 2300 milligrams (mg) of sodium, per day. You should have no more than 1500 mg of sodium a day if:

- You are 51 or older.
- You have high blood pressure, diabetes or kidney disease.
- You are African American.

Sodium is found in many foods. Adding salt to food adds more sodium. The average American adult often eats between 4000 and 9000 mg of sodium a day.

## How do I lower the amount of salt in my diet?

If you take medicine or have any medical problems, check with your healthcare provider before you change your diet. Here are ways to decrease the salt in your diet:

- Eat more whole foods like fresh fruits and vegetables, which have very little sodium.
- Use little or no salt when you prepare food. Try flavoring your food with herb and spice mixes or salt substitutes that do not contain sodium. Avoid seasoning mixes that may have salt in them, such as lemon pepper, Cajun seasoning, and blackening spices. Don't use potassium-based salt substitutes unless your healthcare provider approves.
- Do not add salt to food at the table.
- Read the labels on all canned, packaged, or frozen foods to see how much sodium they contain. Many soups, frozen dinners, lunch meats, flavored potato, rice and noodle mixes, and other processed foods have a lot of sodium.

Be aware that food labels list sodium rather than salt content and the amount is always given in milligrams (mg). Foods that have less than 140 mg sodium per serving are considered to be low in salt.

- Check the sodium content in snack foods, even things that don't taste salty.
- Don't use a lot of sauces or condiments such as ketchup on foods.

After you have been on a low-sodium diet for a while, you may notice that your sense of taste for salt changes. For most people, this takes about 30 days, so it is important to stick with it. There's a good chance you will find that you enjoy eating foods that have less sodium. Some foods, like canned soups and packaged meats, may start tasting too salty.

To learn more about cutting down on sodium, see:

- USDA National Nutrient Database  
<http://ndb.nal.usda.gov/>
- National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute  
<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/hbp/prevent/sodium/sodium.htm>

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## Sodium Content in Foods

Food	Serving	Sodium Content (mg)
<b>Grains and grain products</b>		
Cooked cereal, rice, or pasta, unsalted	1/2 cup	0 to 6
Ready-to-eat cereal	1 cup	100 to 360
Bread	1 slice	110 to 175
<b>Vegetables</b>		
Fresh or frozen, cooked without salt	1/2 cup	1 to 70
Canned or frozen with sauce	1/2 cup	140 to 460
Tomato juice, canned	1 cup	500 to 650
<b>Fruit</b>		
Fresh, frozen, canned	1/2 cup	0 to 15
<b>Low-fat or fat-free dairy foods</b>		
Milk	1 cup	103 to 115
Yogurt	8 oz	130 to 175
Natural cheeses	1 1/2 oz	54 to 395
Processed cheeses	1 1/2 oz	365 to 600
<b>Nuts, Seeds and dry beans</b>		
Peanuts, salted	1 oz	91 to 192
Peanuts, unsalted	1/3 cup	2
Beans, cooked from dried or frozen without salt	1/2 cup	0 to 5
Beans, canned	1/2 cup	332 to 655
<b>Meats, fish and poultry</b>		
Fresh meat, fish, poultry	3 oz	30 to 90
Tuna canned, water pack, no salt added	3 oz	35 to 45
Tuna canned, water pack	3 oz	250 to 320
Ham, lean, roasted	3 oz	908
Egg	1 egg, raw	60 to 80
<b>Fast foods, condiments, and sauces</b>		
Fast food hamburger, single patty	1 sandwich	472 to 640
Fast food hamburger, double patty	1 sandwich	742 to 791
Fast food French fries	Medium	221 to 326
Catsup	1 tablespoon	136
Mustard	1 teaspoon	57
Soy sauce	1 tablespoon	879
Table salt	1 teaspoon	2325

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