



Cut Down on Sodium

Get the facts about sodium and salt from the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. Limiting sodium — by eating out less and making smart choices at the grocery store — can have health benefits.

What is sodium?

Sodium is a mineral, and most of the sodium in our foods comes from salt. We all need a little sodium to stay healthy.

Eating too much sodium can lead to high blood pressure (hypertension). High blood pressure can raise your risk of having a heart attack or stroke.

The good news is that cutting down on sodium can help lower your blood pressure or keep it at a healthy level.

What foods are high in sodium?

Whenever you add salt to your food, you're adding sodium. But the *Dietary Guidelines* shows that most of the sodium we eat doesn't come from our saltshakers. Sodium is used by food manufacturers and others who prepare foods as a preservative and to add flavor, cure meat, thicken sauces, and keep some foods moist. That's why sodium is found in almost all of the processed and prepared foods we buy.

Dishes with many ingredients — like pizza, casseroles, burgers, tacos, and sandwiches — tend to have ingredients that are high in sodium. When making these dishes, limit ingredients that are often high in sodium:

- Processed meats, poultry, and seafood — like deli meats, sausages, pepperoni, and sardines
- Sauces, dressings, and condiments
- Instant products like flavored rice, instant noodles, and ready-made pasta

Keep in mind that even foods that don't taste salty may still be adding sodium to your diet, especially if you eat them often. For example, the sodium found in foods like breads and tortillas, cheese, and condiments can add up.

Key Recommendations: Sodium

Age range	Amount of sodium
Adults* and children 14 years and older	Less than 2,300 mg a day
Children ages 9 to 13	Less than 2,200 mg a day
Children ages 4 to 8	Less than 1,900 mg a day
Children ages 2 to 3	Less than 1,500 mg a day

*Adults without hypertension or prehypertension

Adults with hypertension or prehypertension can lower their blood pressure even more by limiting sodium intake to 1,500 mg a day.

Sodium and salt — what's the difference?

Since most sodium in our foods comes from salt, people use the 2 words as if they're the same thing. They're actually a little different. Sodium is a mineral that's **in** salt. Salt is also known as *sodium chloride*.



How can I cut down on sodium?

Pay close attention to the foods you choose when you're grocery shopping and eating out. Try making these 5 small changes.

- 1. Check the Nutrition Facts label.** Before you buy a food or drink, look for the amount of sodium on the Nutrition Facts label. Compare different options and choose the one with the lowest amount.

You can also look out for foods that are labeled low-sodium, reduced sodium, or no-salt-added. But keep in mind that sometimes foods without these labels are still lower in sodium — so it's always a good idea to check the Nutrition Facts label.

Nutrition Facts	
8 servings per container	
Serving size 2/3 cup (55g)	
Amount per serving	
Calories 230	
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 8g	16%
Saturated Fat 1g	2%
Trans Fat 0g	0%
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 160mg	7%
Total Carbohydrate 37g	7%
Dietary Fiber 4g	8%
Total Sugars 12g	24%
Includes 10g Added Sugars	20%
Protein 3g	
Vitamin D 2mcg	40%
Calcium 260mg	52%
Iron 6mg	108%
Potassium 235mg	47%

*The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

Two slices of thick-crust pizza with pepperoni add up to about 2,270 mg of sodium — almost the daily recommended sodium limit for adults and children 14 years and up!



- 2. Find out which foods you eat have the most sodium.** You can use the USDA's SuperTracker (<https://supertracker.usda.gov>) to get an idea. For dishes higher in sodium, consider eating smaller portions or eating them less often.

- 3. Make healthy shifts.** Replace higher-sodium foods or ingredients with healthier options. You can:



Snack on unsalted nuts instead of snacks like salted pretzels

Choose fresh skinless chicken and turkey, lean meats, and seafood instead of processed deli meats or sausages

Go for fresh, frozen vegetables without sauce, and canned vegetables with the least amount of sodium

When eating out, you can:

- Ask for the written nutrition information and look for items that are lower in sodium
- Get dressings and sauces on the side — and add only the amount you need to your meal
- Ask to have no salt added to your food

- 4. Cook more at home.** Making your own meals — instead of eating at restaurants or buying packaged foods — is a great way to eat less sodium because you're in control. To add flavor, use spices instead of salt or packaged sauces and mixes.

- 5. Consider the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) eating plan.** Based on scientific evidence, the DASH plan helps limit sodium and unhealthy fats. Think about following the DASH eating plan at the lower-sodium option of 1,500 mg per day if you have hypertension or prehypertension. Learn more about it at <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/dash>.

There are lots of different types of salt: table salt, kosher salt, sea salt, Himalayan salt, and more. To lower the sodium in your diet, you need to cut down on **all** types of salt, including salt already in foods.

Want to learn more about sodium and how to find a healthy eating pattern that works for you or your family? Check out DietaryGuidelines.gov for more information on the *Dietary Guidelines* and ChooseMyPlate.gov for online tools, recipes, and more.

