

Stewardship of the Body

“I give you thanks that I am fearfully, wonderfully made” (Ps. 139)



Salt, Sodium, and Your Health

Why do we need salt?

Salt is essential to our body's fluids, however, too much salt can lead to a number of health problems.

The chemical name for the salt that we eat is: sodium chloride. Ninety percent of the sodium we take in is from salt, so the salt we eat determines to a large extent how much sodium is in our body.

How does salt/sodium affect us?

One well known effect of sodium is on our blood pressure. Many studies on animals and people have shown that a higher salt intake raises blood pressure, and reducing our salt intake reduces our blood pressure.

The amount of salt we have to take in or eliminate from our diets in order to affect the blood pressure varies with different people. Some groups of people see greater reductions in blood pressure when they lower their salt intake, such as African-Americans, older people and people with high blood pressure.

How much of a problem is high blood pressure?

It is estimated that about 1 in 3 adults nationwide has high blood pressure right now and another 1/3 have “prehypertension” meaning their blood pressure numbers are high enough to put them at risk to develop high blood pressure. Because of this, the majority of the population needs to reduce their blood pressure.

How can reducing our sodium intake help?

Experts recommend that people take in less than 2,400 milligrams of sodium a day: that's about a teaspoon a day. People with high blood pressure should shoot for 1,500 milligrams or less per day. It is estimated that the average man in the U.S. now takes in over 10 grams (10,000 milligrams) of salt per day and the average woman takes in over 7 grams (7000 milligrams).

A recent study funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) found that reducing salt intake by 3 grams (3000 milligrams) per day could cut the number of new cases of heart disease each year by 120,000, stroke by 66,000 and heart attacks by 100,000 and prevent up to 92,000 deaths per year.

But I like salt!

Several studies have shown that as you gradually reduce your sodium intake, you lessen your desire for salty food. Researchers stress that a very modest decrease in the amount of salt, hardly detectable in the taste of food, can have dramatic health benefits for the people in the U. S.

The UK has reduced salt consumption by 10% over the past 4 years by working with industry to reduce the salt content in processed foods, requiring labels on ready-to-eat foods, and educating the public. Surveys of people have found that most people didn't notice any difference in the taste of their food.

Where does all of that salt come from?

The salt we sprinkle on our food actually accounts for less than 10% of our salt consumption. Most of the salt we eat comes in processed foods from stores, restaurants, and dining halls. Fast foods, cold cuts and canned foods tend to have a lot of salt. Studies have found that over 20% of the salt in the average American' diet comes from grain products, such as breads, cereals, crackers and chips.

What should we do?

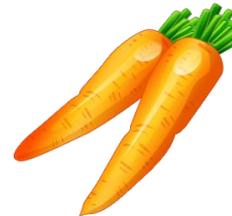
- Pay attention to the nutrition facts on the labels. The % daily value is a better guide than the language that's used on food labels like "low salt". Try to select foods with less than 5% of the daily value of salt per serving.



- Use fresh poultry, fish and lean meat, rather than canned, smoked or processed meat.



- Choose fresh or frozen vegetables that have no added salt.



- Rinse canned foods to remove some of the sodium. Most canned vegetables have a lot of sodium added.



- In cooking and at the table, cut back on salt and flavor foods with herbs, spices, lemon, lime, vinegar or salt-free seasoning blends.



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