What You Need to Know About Salt and Sodium

What is the Difference Between Salt and Sodium?

Salt (table salt) is made of 40% sodium and 60% chloride. It is used as a seasoning and a preservative in foods. One teaspoon of salt contains 2300 mg of sodium.

Sodium is an essential mineral used by the body to control fluid balance, contract muscles and conduct nerve impulses. Healthy kidneys keep sodium and water in balance.

Why Do I Need to Limit My Sodium Intake?

Too much salt or sodium in your diet can:

- Make you thirsty
- Cause your body to hold onto water
- Increase your blood pressure

The taste for salt is learned. When you cut down on salt, your taste buds will gradually adjust. Most studies show that 2-3 weeks of stopping or reducing salt intake will result in changes to your taste buds that allow you to taste less salt.

How Much Sodium Should I Have in a Day?

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend most adults consume no more than 2300 mg of sodium per day. Most people eat more than 3500 mg of sodium per day. Choose foods with 140 mg of sodium or less per serving. Aim for full meals to have 600 mg or less. Foods with more than 300 mg of sodium per serving may not fit into your meal plan.

Where Does Sodium in the Diet Come From?

- More than 70% of the sodium we consume comes from ready-to-eat foods, fast foods, restaurants foods, canned foods or packaged foods, and some seasonings:
    - 1 slice of pizza can contain 600 mg sodium, canned soups can contain over 800 mg sodium per cup, a fast-food cheeseburger and French fries can contain over 1000 mg sodium.
    - Soy sauce can contain over 900 mg sodium per Tablespoon and hot sauce can contain 500 mg sodium per Tablespoon.

- Salt we add to food during cooking or at meals:
    - 1 teaspoon of table salt contains 2300 mg sodium
- Over the counter medications such as antacids:
    - Some antacids contain sodium bicarbonate and can have 300-600 mg sodium per tablet.

The Top Food Sources of Sodium in Food and Our Diet Are:

- Breads/Rolls
- Pizza
- Sandwiches
- Cold cuts, luncheon, and cured meats
- Soups
- Burritos/Tacos
- Savory Snacks (chips, crackers, pretzels, popcorn, snack mixes)
- Poultry
- Cheese
- Egg Dishes/Omelets

Label Reading:

- Sodium Free/Salt-Free: less than 5 mg sodium per serving
- No Salt Added: No salt has been added in processing. These products may still contain sodium. Check the label.
- Low Sodium: 140 mg sodium or less per serving
- Reduced Sodium: 25% less sodium than the regular product (these products may still be high sodium foods)
- Lightly Salted: 50% less sodium than the regular product

Same Old Salt, Different Name:

The various salts listed below have similar sodium content when compared to table salt. If you are reducing your overall sodium intake, these do not make good substitutes:

- Sea Salt – comes from the ocean, includes other minerals in very small amounts
- Kosher Salt – larger granules, measures differently in recipes
- Himalayan pink Salt – mined in Pakistan, natural minerals give it color
- Indian black Salt – contains sulfur which gives it an egg-like flavor
- Smoked Salt – smoky flavor but still contains sodium

What About Salt Substitutes?

Salt substitutes and low-sodium salts often contain potassium chloride. Potassium chloride may taste bitter when heated at normal cooking temperatures. Too much potassium may be harmful for some people, especially those with kidney disease. Always check with your Primary Care Provider or Dietitian before switching to these salt substitutes.

Herbs and Spices:

Look for herb and spice blends at your local grocery store. Many are sodium and potassium free. Consider making your own homemade spice blend using individual spices and mixing them together without adding any salt to the blend!