

# Salt and Sodium - March 30, 2011

Salt has been in the news a lot lately. Most research studies indicate Americans are consuming far too much salt. Let's look at some of the issues involved.

Sodium chloride is the chemical name for salt. Sodium and salt do not mean the same thing, but they are frequently used interchangeably. This is not surprising since ninety percent of the sodium we consume is in the form of salt. A more simple way to see the relationship is to remember that one teaspoon of salt provides 2,000 milligrams of sodium.

Sodium plays an important role in maintaining the water balance within cells. However, having too much sodium in your diet may increase your blood pressure and raise your risk for heart disease, stroke, and kidney disease.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, Americans on average get over 3,400 mg of sodium a day. The majority of it comes from packaged, processed, store-bought and restaurant or fast food.

In the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, released jointly by the U. S. Department of Agriculture and the Department of Health and Human Services, the recommendation for most Americans is to reduce the daily sodium intake to less than 2,300 milligrams each day. For certain high-risk groups, such as African-Americans, people over age 51, and those who have hypertension, diabetes, or chronic kidney disease, the recommendation is to reduce the intake to 1,500 mg or about ½ teaspoon.

Some people reduce their salt intake by using salt substitutes which contain potassium chloride instead of sodium chloride. You should check with your doctor before using salt substitutes, especially if you take medication for heart, kidney, or liver problems.

## ***Nutrition Facts Labels***

The required labels on purchased foods can be very helpful in watching the amount of sodium you consume. The amount of sodium is listed on the label in two ways—in milligrams and in a percentage of the Daily Value, based on a 2,000 calorie diet. You can track your total daily milligrams of sodium used and try to keep below the recommended amount. Or you can monitor the total by percentages, trying to keep below 100%.

If you normally use more salt than the recommended amounts, it can be challenging to reduce it. The preference for salty foods is a learned behavior. But over time you can reduce your cravings for salty foods and limit the amount of salt added to your foods at meal time.

Compare the sodium amounts of packaged foods, rather than relying solely on claims on the front of the package, like "lower in sodium." It's important also to note the fat content. Since both fat and salt provide flavor, manufacturers may increase fat when reducing salt to maintain a pleasing taste.

In order to lower sodium amounts, some manufacturers use potassium chloride. If this is an issue for you, carefully read the ingredient list for processed foods.

Be sure to look at the serving size. A can of ready-to-eat soup may have 470 mg sodium per serving but the can contains two servings. If you consume the entire can for a meal, you will have consumed over 900 mg of sodium.

## ***Sea Salt***

Sea salt is typically marketed as being a healthier alternative to table salt. Although they differ in taste, texture and processing, they have the same basic nutritional value. In other words, sea salt is still salt.

## ***Ways to reduce the amount of salt***

Instead of trying to mimic the flavor of sodium with salt substitutes, open yourself, and your taste buds, to appreciate the wide range of flavors occurring naturally. If you need extra flavoring, try some of the commercial salt-free blends or experiment with herbs and spices. The flavors most effective in replacing the taste of salt are black pepper, garlic powder, curry powder, cumin, dill seeds, basil, ginger, coriander and onion.

- Use minced or powdered garlic and onion rather than garlic salt and onion salt. If a recipe calls for 1/2 teaspoon garlic salt, you will find 1/4 teaspoon garlic powder provides much the same flavor.

- Frozen vegetables are typically lower in sodium than canned vegetables. If salt has been added to frozen vegetables, it will be included in the ingredient list.
- Look for lower salt or no salt versions of canned vegetables. If your favorite canned vegetable is not available in a lower salt version, drain and rinse the vegetables before using. This is especially true of canned beans.
- Avoid salting food during cooking or reduce the amount of salt you add in cooking. Taste the food, and if you must add salt, give the salt shaker one shake instead of two.
- Cut back on the amount of salt added to the water for cooking rice, noodles, or pasta. Eventually you might be able to eliminate the salt entirely.
- Cut down on the amount of salt in your favorite recipes; use less salt each time you make it. One exception to this is yeast breads, which require salt.
- Cover up some of the holes on the salt shaker, or remove the shaker from the table.
- Limit your use of condiments, dressing, and sauces. Pickles, olives, Worcestershire sauce, mayonnaise, ketchup, soy sauce, steak sauce, and barbeque sauce typically are high in sodium.
- Use more fresh or home-prepared foods and fewer processed foods. Purchase fresh or frozen fish, shellfish, poultry, and meat without sauces, marinades, or breading.
- Eat cheese in moderation.
- Remember that it will take time to “retrain” your taste buds, especially if you eat a lot of processed foods and other salty foods. Cut down on added salt slowly to adjust gradually to the new taste. Maybe these recipes will help you begin to reduce the sodium in your diet.

**Chicken Fried Rice:** This recipe contains less sodium than fried rice made with regular soy sauce.

1 tablespoon corn oil or safflower oil	½ teaspoon pepper
½ cup grated carrots	3 cups cooked brown rice
1 cup cooked, chopped chicken breasts, skin and bones removed	3 tablespoons lite soy sauce
1 egg and 1 egg white,* lightly beaten	2/3 cup scallions, sliced

In a wok or skillet, heat oil over medium heat. Add carrots and chicken. Stir-fry 1 minute. Add eggs and pepper and stir-fry 1 minute. Add rice and soy sauce. Stir-fry 5 minutes. Garnish with scallions. Serve immediately. \* To reduce fat and cholesterol, use an egg substitute with less than 2 grams fat per serving. Fat and calorie content may vary between brands.

*Yield: 6 servings. Nutrition facts per serving: 200 calories; 5 grams fat; 350 mg sodium.*

### **Salad Dressing**

1/3 cup olive oil	1 tablespoon lemon or lime juice
2/3 cup red wine vinegar	¼ teaspoon dry mustard
¼ teaspoon pepper	1 tablespoon sugar
½ teaspoon paprika	1 teaspoon finely chopped onion

Shake together before serving on tossed salad. Makes 8 servings.

*Approx. per serving: 85 calories; 9 grams fat; less than 5 mg sodium.*

### **Spaghetti Sauce**

2 tablespoons olive oil	1 tablespoon oregano, dried
2 small onion, chopped	1 (8 ounce) can tomato sauce
3 cloves garlic, chopped	1 (6 ounce) can tomato paste
1 1/4 cups zucchini, sliced	2 medium tomatoes, chopped
1 tablespoon basil, dried	1 cup water

In a medium skillet, heat oil. Sauté onions, garlic, and zucchini in oil for 5 minutes over medium heat. Add remaining ingredients and simmer covered for 45 minutes. Serve over pasta.

*Yield: 6 servings; 3/4 cup each. Nutrition facts per serving: 105 calories; 5g total fat; 1g saturated fat; 0mg cholesterol; 479mg sodium, 3g protein; 15g carbohydrate; 686mg potassium; 4g fiber.*

*\*Note: Use a 6-ounce can of low-sodium tomato paste, and reduce the sodium per serving to 253mg.*

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