

# Reducing Sodium Intake



Sodium is an essential nutrient used by the body to maintain blood volume, regulate water balance in cells, and aid in nerve function. However, overconsumption of sodium can lead to high blood pressure, which increases the risk of cardiovascular disease, congestive heart failure, and kidney disease. The recommended intake for sodium is between 1500 and 2300 milligrams (mg) per day. The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that the average American consumes about 3400 mg of sodium per day, well above the recommended amount. Because salt adds flavor to foods and acts as a preservative, it is used frequently in food processing. This makes processed foods, such as canned goods, higher in sodium compared to fresh or homemade foods.

Sodium is mainly consumed in the form of salt, or sodium chloride. Most sources state a teaspoon of salt contains between 2300 mg and 2400 mg of sodium.

## Salt to Sodium

To convert salt to sodium, divide the salt in grams by 2.5 and then multiply by 1000 to get milligrams of sodium. (grams of salt  $\div$  2.5 = grams of sodium  $\times$  1000)

Example: 1 teaspoon salt = 6 grams (g) of salt

$6 \text{ g} \div 2.5 = 2.4 \text{ g salt} \times \text{by } 1000 = 2400 \text{ mg of sodium}$       $6 \text{ g salt} = 2400 \text{ mg of sodium}$

## Sodium to Salt

To convert sodium to salt, multiply the sodium in mg by 2.5 and then divide by 1000.

$2400 \text{ mg of sodium} \times 2.5 = 6000 \text{ mg of salt} \div 1000 = 6 \text{ g salt}$

## Tips for Reducing Sodium Intake

- Choose fresh foods instead of processed food products. Make recipes from scratch to control the sodium content instead of using pre-packaged "heat and serve" items.
- Use spices and herbs to add flavor to foods instead of salt and seasoning salts. Many condiments commonly added to foods, such as soy sauce or salad dressings, are often high in sodium.
- When using processed and packaged foods, compare Nutrition Facts labels and choose items with lower sodium content. Foods that contain less than 140 mg of sodium per serving are considered low-sodium.
- Because sodium is found in many foods, high calorie intake usually leads to high sodium intake. Consuming in moderation and avoiding overeating in general can help keep sodium intake at the recommended level.

**Source:** U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2011). *Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2010* 7th Edition, Washington, D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, December 2010. <http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/Publications/DietaryGuidelines/2010/PolicyDoc/PolicyDoc.pdf>

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