Salt and sodium are not exactly the same, but the words are often used in place of each other. Ninety percent of the sodium consumed is in the form of salt, or sodium chloride. The front of food packages may say “low salt,” but the Nutrition Facts labels list “sodium” content.

Sodium is an essential mineral needed by the body in small amounts for fluid balance, nerve transmission and contraction and relaxation of muscles, including the heart. Over 90% of all Americans consume too much sodium (salt), which increases blood pressure.

**2010 Sodium Recommendations**
The 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend eating more nutrient dense foods while limiting sodium and calories from solid fats and added sugars. Adults should limit intake of sodium to less than 2,300 milligrams (mg) per day, or about 1 teaspoon of salt. The average American, ages 2 years and older, consumes about 3,400 mg of sodium per day, or approximately 50% too much.

Certain at-risk populations should reduce their daily intake to 1,500 mg of sodium, or ½ teaspoon of salt. These groups include:
- African Americans ages 2 and older
- people who are age 51 and older
- people with hypertension (high blood pressure)
- people with diabetes
- people with chronic kidney disease.

The recommended serving size for most luncheon meats is 2 ounces, yet many restaurant-style deli sandwiches contain 5-6 ounces of meat. A sandwich with two slices of white bread and only 2 ounces of luncheon meat contains almost half of the Adequate Intake (AI) for sodium! The AI for sodium is 1,500 mg or less per day, based on age and other individual characteristics.

The more foods and beverages you consume, the more sodium you tend to consume. Cutting back on calories can help lower sodium intake.

**Why Consume Less Sodium?**
Eating less sodium (salt) can help Americans meet nutritional needs within appropriate calorie levels and help reduce chronic disease risk.

Blood pressure decreases as sodium intake decreases. Keeping blood pressure in the normal range reduces the risk of strokes, heart attacks, congestive heart failure, cardiovascular disease and kidney disease. It also reduces health care costs.

**Sources of Sodium**
Sodium is found in a wide variety of foods. These processed foods are major sources of sodium.
- yeast breads
- chicken dishes, beef dishes, soups
- pizza, pasta and pasta dishes
- cold cuts, sausage, hot dogs, bacon and ribs
- regular cheese
- grain-based desserts

According to a June 2010 report from The Center for Disease Control (CDC), 77% of sodium intake comes from packaged, processed, store bought and restaurant/fast foods. About 37% of that amount comes from grains, including highly processed foods like bread, frozen meals and soups. Although
bread may not always taste “salty,” it may be high in sodium. Another 27.9% comes from meats, poultry and fish, especially processed meats and fried items. Almost 12.5% of sodium comes from processed vegetables in cans and prepared sauces.

There must be an immediate, coordinated approach to reduce the sodium content in foods in the marketplace. If manufacturers, restaurant and foodservice operators gradually reduce the amount of sodium in processed and prepared foods to meet new government standards, consumers will lower sodium intake to safer levels while adjusting their taste preferences for less salt.

**Tips to Reduce Your Salt Intake**

**Eat Less Processed Foods:** Consume fewer foods such as processed meats (e.g. luncheon meats and smoked or cured meats high in sodium), breads, boxed meals with pre-packaged flavorings, frozen meals and soups.

**Cook From Scratch:** To have more control over sodium, eat more home-prepared foods. Foods cooked from scratch are lower in sodium and cost.

**Season With Fresh or Dried Herbs, Citrus Juices or Zest & Flavored Vinegars:** These are naturally low in sodium. When cooking, use little or no salt or high-sodium condiments (e.g. soy sauce and salad dressings). Buy low-sodium salad dressings instead of regular dressings.

**Do Not Add Salt at the Table:** Remove the salt shaker from the table. Always taste a food before adding more salt or salt-containing seasonings. Your taste for salt will decrease over time.

**When Eating Out:** Ask that salt not be added to food, or order lower sodium options, if available. Have sauces and salad dressings served on the side so you can eat less of them.

**Pay Attention to Condiments:** Eat less pickles, olives and salad dressings. Choose low-sodium ketchup and soy sauce, and use only a sprinkling of seasoning packets.

**At the Grocery Store:** Always check the Nutrition Facts labels for the sodium content of foods. Foods that are low in sodium are also low in salt. Look for no-added-salt or low sodium versions of vegetables, broth, etc. Processed foods can be high in sodium but disguise it in small serving sizes.

**Fresh or Frozen Vegetables & Meats:** Most vegetables are naturally low in sodium. Choose fresh or frozen vegetables (without sauce) rather than canned vegetables, and do not add salt during cooking or at the table.

Eat fresh or frozen lean meats, seafood and poultry instead of meats that have been smoked, cured, dried or canned. Buy chicken that has not had sodium added. Do not add salt or ingredients containing sodium.

**Cereals:** Most ready-to-eat breakfast cereals are high in added salt. Read labels to find some low-sodium alternatives with less than 140 mg per serving, including oatmeal.

**Cheeses:** Processed cheeses usually are high in salt and should be limited. This includes varieties such as Parmesan, American, Blue, Swiss, Provolone, Mozzarella and Cheddar.

**Soups:** Eat reduced-sodium soups or prepare homemade soups.

**Snack Foods:** Chips, crackers, pretzels, popcorn and other popular snack foods are high in added salt. Look for unsalted or low sodium versions. Raisins, dried fruit, unsalted nuts and vegetables are good alternatives. Substitute unsalted crackers and corn tortillas for high-sodium snacks and breads.

**Sources:**


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