

# Nutrition News

## Information for Senior Citizens

Developed by Colorado State University Extension  
Department of Food Science & Human Nutrition

### Are you worth your salt?

"The salt of life." "An old salt." "A salty dog." People have always loved their salt. In ancient times, traders carried bags of salt to far-off lands, where they were paid in gold for their precious goods. Roman soldiers were allowed money to buy salt; their word for salt was *sal*, and from this we get the word "salary."

**In 1398 A.D. John de Trevisa wrote, "Salte makes potage and other mete (meat) savourye."**

But what do salt, sodium, and Na have in common, and why do we hear so much in the news about it? Well, salt is made up of two substances: sodium and chloride. Table salt is 40% sodium and 60% chloride. The scientific abbreviation for sodium is Na.

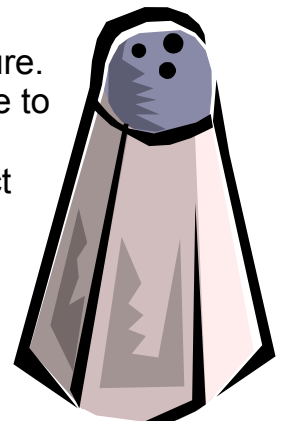
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Sodium is an important nutrient. We must have about 400 mg of sodium (about 1/4 teaspoon of salt) each day to stay healthy. The problem is that salt makes our food taste so good that the average American uses 3 to 5 teaspoons of salt daily; this is 5,000 - 8,000 mg of sodium! Is this a cause for concern? No one knows for certain, but did you know . . .

- Some countries use no salt, and high blood pressure is rare.
- Some countries (United States, Japan) have very high salt and sodium intakes, and high blood pressure is common.
- High blood pressure is usually lowered when sodium is restricted in the diet.
- Soft water is high in sodium, and people who live in areas with soft water often have hypertension.

Too much sodium can upset the body's water balance, causing you to retain extra water. It can also cause contraction of blood vessels, which raises your blood pressure. Not everyone is sensitive to sodium in this way, but there is no way to predict who is at risk. One-half of Americans over age 65 may be sodium-sensitive to some degree.



## Sodium and Hypertension

Hypertension (high blood pressure) affects one in four adults in the United States. It is often called the “silent killer” because it can go undetected for years.

Sodium is not the only factor in the development of hypertension. It can also result from other things, such as stress, atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries), obesity, and lack of calcium, potassium, and magnesium. However, the link between sodium and hypertension is strong enough that the Dietary Guidelines advise all Americans to cut down on their sodium intake.

### Steps to Reduce Sodium

The Dietary Guidelines recommend that sodium intake be less than 2,300 mg but greater than 300 mg per day. This is the amount of sodium in one teaspoon of salt (remember that salt is only 40% sodium). For some people 1,500 mg is considered about right. This is especially important if you have high blood pressure.

Follow the tips below to decrease sodium in your diet:

- Remove the saltshaker from the table. This can cut your intake by 1/4 to 1/3.
- Watch for disguised sodium in products such as monosodium glutamate (MSG) and sodium bicarbonate (baking soda).
- Read food labels. They tell you the amount of sodium per serving.
- Replace processed foods with fresh alternatives. The more processed the food is, the more sodium it may contain.
- Season foods with herbs and spices rather than salt.
- Use vegetable oil instead of butter or margarine in cooking.

When you first start preparing foods without salt, they may taste bland to you. Instead of cutting salt out all together, try gradually using less salt at the table and when preparing foods. The taste of salt is learned—you discover that you like it, so you use more and more. If it can be learned, it can also be unlearned!

There are many ways to add flavor to your food with out using salt. Use the list below to help you get started.

- Sundried tomatoes (dried, not oil-packed)
- Shiitake mushrooms
- Garlic or onion powder (not salt)
- Minced dried onion
- Dried or fresh herbs
- Lime or lemon juice
- Cilantro
- Cayenne, jalapenos, & other hot peppers
- Reduced-sodium canned chicken and beef broth
- Balsamic vinegar

Try this salsa recipe to add flavor to eggs, vegetables, and broiled fish or poultry.

### Worth-Your-Salt Salsa

#### Ingredients:

- 2 cups chopped fresh tomatoes
- 1/4 cup chopped onion
- 3 Tbsp minced cilantro
- 2 Tbsp chopped jalapeno (hot) or serrano (mild) pepper
- 2 - 3 Tbsp lemon juice

#### Directions:

Mix all ingredients well and let stand several minutes. Can be refrigerated for several days.

**Yield:** 2½ cups (4 mg sodium per ¼ cup)

## Sodium Quiz

### Which has more sodium:

1. Two strips of bacon or ½ cup instant pudding?
2. One ounce American (processed) cheese or 1 cup cottage cheese?
3. Four saltine crackers or 1 cup milk?
4. Three large stalks celery or 2 medium apples?
5. One cup grated carrot or 3 ounces roast beef?
6. One large dill pickle or 1 Tbsp soy sauce?
7. One slice bologna or 1 Tbsp catsup?
8. One ounce cheddar cheese or 4 graham cracker squares?

### Answers (in mg of sodium)

1. Bacon 300; pudding 450
2. American 320; cottage 520
3. Saltines 120; milk 120
4. Apples 4; celery 150
5. Roast beef 51; carrot 50
6. Soy sauce 1,000; pickle 1,200
7. Catsup 200; bologna 295
8. Cheese 176; graham crackers 200

Were you surprised to find that the milk and saltines contained the same amount of sodium? Did you notice that processed foods such as bacon, cottage cheese, and catsup are often high in sodium?



## How Much Sodium Are You Eating?

Here's an experiment that might be fun: Check the labels of the foods you eat for one day and add up the total amount of sodium you're getting from them. Subtract that amount from one teaspoon of salt (2,000 mg). The amount remaining is the salt you can add in cooking or at the table.

For instance, let's say your total for the day comes to 1,100 mg of sodium. Subtract this from 2,000 mg to find out how much sodium you can add to your food during preparation and at the table. This leaves 900 mg--the amount in about 1/2 teaspoon of salt.

Now, measure out ½ teaspoon of salt and put it in a dish. Use only the salt in this dish for cooking and in salting food at the table for one day. Was there some left over? Or did you wish you had more?

It's not always easy to cut down on the amount of sodium in your diet. If you finished this experiment wishing that you had more salt to use, try some of the tips on page 2 of this newsletter to add flavor to your food. It might take some getting used to, but with practice and an open mind you can find new ways to prepare your favorite foods.

For more information on sodium, contact your local county Extension office. In Colorado, request Colorado State University's Fact Sheet 9.318, *Sodium, Calcium, Potassium and Calories - Role in Hypertension*, and 9.354, *Sodium in the Diet*. Check out CSU Extension's web site for fact sheets, <http://www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/foodnut/pubfood.html>.

Your CSU Extension agent can also help you find out whether the water in your area is hard or soft. Or call the National Institute for Aging at 1-800-222-2225 and ask for the *Age Page* called "Be Sensible About Salt."

## Fitness Focus: Abdominal Muscles

Abdominal muscles are very important for good posture and for good breathing. Strong stomach muscles also help prevent back pain. Here are two exercises to help tone this area. As always, be sure to have a physical and discuss new exercises with your doctor before trying any new exercise program.

**1. Head and Shoulder Curl (easier):** *to firm stomach muscle and front of neck.* Lie on back, legs straight, and arms at sides. Curl head and shoulders off floor. Hold for 5 counts. Return to starting position. Suggested repetitions: 10.



**2. Sit-up, Arms Crossed (more advanced):** *to improve abdominal strength.* Lie on back, arms crossed on chest, hands grasping opposite shoulders. Curl up to sitting position. Curl down to starting position. For best effect, secure feet under something stationary, such as a chair, to prevent them from lifting during exercise. Suggested repetitions: 10 - 15.



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### **Senior Resource: My Food Stamp benefits have been discontinued. What can I do?**

If your application is denied or not acted upon within a reasonable time period, or after approval, your benefits are subsequently reduced or discontinued, or if you believe the Food Stamp office has not followed the Food Stamp laws and regulations properly, you may ask for a hearing. Your county Department of Human Services caseworker will help you file an appeal.

For more information and to find out if you or someone you know qualifies for food stamps, call 1-800-221-5689.