

# SODIUM IN THE DIET

## Experts Advise Getting Less as Part of a Healthy Eating Plan

For years now, Americans have been advised to cut back on their sodium intake and follow a healthy eating plan. These lifestyle changes can help reduce the risk of developing high blood pressure and lower already elevated blood pressure. With recent changes to defining high blood pressure, nearly half of the U.S. adult population (47%) has high blood pressure. Hypertension is a major risk factor for heart disease and stroke. If left untreated, it can damage the kidneys and cause hardening of the arteries.

Several leading public health agencies and organizations recently updated and released new sodium guidelines for the public: Most adults should lower their intake to below 2,300 milligrams per day. Individuals with high blood pressure, high-risk populations such as African Americans, and middle-aged or older adults should cut back even further to 1,500 milligrams daily.

**\*Normal Blood Pressure: Less than 120/80 mm Hg**

## Snapshot on Sodium

**Salt vs. Sodium: What’s the Difference?** Many times, the terms “salt” and “sodium” are used interchangeably, when in fact they are not one and the same. Table salt is a compound made from sodium and chloride; a teaspoon of salt is 40% sodium and 60% chloride. One teaspoon of salt contains 2,300 milligrams of sodium.

**Where is Sodium Found?** On average, most Americans consume more than 3,400 milligrams of sodium per day. Most of that sodium – about 75 percent – comes not from salt added at the table, but from hidden levels found in packaged and processed foods, including breads; chicken and chicken mixed dishes; beef and beef mixed dishes; Mexican mixed dishes; pizza; pasta and pasta dishes; cold cuts; condiments; sausage, franks, bacon; regular cheese and soups.

## Meet the “Salty Six”

The American Heart Association has a list of six popular foods high in sodium content:

Food Item	Sodium (mg)
Breads and Rolls	230 mg per piece
Pizza	760 mg per slice
Cold cuts and cured meats	578 mg in 2 bologna slices
Canned soups	940 mg in 1 cup canned chicken noodle
Sandwiches	1500 mg between bread, cured meats, cheese, and condiments
Burritos and Tacos	Up to 1000 mg

## THE BIGGER PICTURE

### An Eating Plan That Focuses on What You CAN Eat

Several years ago, researchers discovered that an eating plan dubbed DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) effectively reduced high blood pressure, especially when it limited sodium to a level of 1,500 milligrams per day. The **DASH Diet** emphasizes fruits, vegetables, and fat-free or low-fat dairy. It includes whole grains, poultry, fish and nuts and has reduced amounts of fats, red meat, sweets and sugared beverages. It is low in saturated fat, total fat and cholesterol. It is rich in calcium, potassium and magnesium – minerals found to be important in maintaining normal blood pressure.

\*Additional information on the DASH Diet can be found at [www.dashdiet.org](http://www.dashdiet.org)

### 6 Tips to DASH to Wellness

- Add a serving of vegetables at lunch, dinner, and snacks
- If you don't eat fruit now, add a serving at breakfast and a serving later in the day as a snack
- Instead of drinking soda or sweetened beverages, gradually add fat free or low-fat milk as a beverage
- Add a container of low-fat yogurt or 1 oz. of unsalted nuts as a snack, in place of chips or a candy bar
- Jump start your day with a DASH breakfast: Fruit + Low fat dairy + Whole grain cereal/bread
- Enhance the flavor of foods with spices, fresh or dried herbs or grated citrus peel instead of salt

### Master Plan: DASH for a Day - 2,000 calorie diet

Type of Food	Number of Servings
Grains and grain products	7-8
Fruits	4-5
Vegetables	4-5
Low fat or non-fat dairy foods	2-3
Poultry, fish, lean meats	2 or less (3 oz. servings)
Nuts, seed and legumes	4-5 per week
Fats and sweets	Limited (3 ½ tsps. fat)

### Sample for a Day

#### Breakfast

¾ cup bran flakes with 1 medium banana + 1 cup low fat milk  
 1 slice whole wheat toast + 1 tsp whole-fruit jam  
 1 cup orange juice

#### Lunch

¾ cup chicken salad + 2 slices whole wheat bread + 1 Tbsp. Dijon mustard  
 Salad: ½ cup cucumber slices, ½ cup tomato wedges, 1 Tbsp. sunflower seeds, 1 tsp. low calorie Vinaigrette  
 ½ cup fruit cocktail, packed in natural juice

#### Dinner

3 oz. beef, eye of round + 2 Tbsp. fat free gravy  
 1 cup green beans sautéed with garlic and ½ tsp olive oil  
 1 small baked potato + 1 Tbsp. chopped scallions + 1 Tbsp. fat free sour cream + 1 Tbsp. shredded reduced fat cheddar cheese  
 1 small whole wheat roll + 1 tsp. olive oil  
 1 small apple  
 1 cup low fat milk

#### Snacks

1/3 cup unsalted almonds + ¼ cup raisins + ½ cup fruit yogurt, fat free, no sugar added

Sources/Resources: National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, [www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health); Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025; [www.dashdiet.org](http://www.dashdiet.org); National Cancer Institute; CDC, [cdc.gov/bloodpressure/facts.htm](http://cdc.gov/bloodpressure/facts.htm)