

# Nutrition News

Department of Human Nutrition



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## Just a Pinch of Salt

Sodium, one of the two ions that make up salt (sodium chloride), is an essential ingredient for life. It helps keep the body's fluids in balance, and is necessary for proper functioning of nerves and muscles. In ancient times and before refrigeration became available, salt was important in food preservation. Today we know that it enhances flavor and color and serves as a stabilizer of foods. However, as *essential* as this substance is for life, we only need a small amount.

Most Americans find themselves frequently eating meals on-the-go and doing very little cooking from scratch, making it difficult to moderate the amount of sodium in their diets. As a result our taste buds have grown accustomed to a higher level than is needed for optimum health. In fact, some scientists believe that some of us are almost "addicted" to the pleasurable effect of salt.

*Where is the salt in our diet?*

Approximately 10% of the total salt we eat occurs naturally in our food, 5-10 % we add as we prepare and eat food, leaving about 75-80 % of the sodium being added in one form or another by the commercial food industry and restaurants.

*What are the experts telling us?*

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), U.S. Department of Human Services (HHS) and the American Heart Association (AHA) currently recommend most Americans limit their daily intake of sodium to 2300 mg (1 t. of salt). For those who are 40+ years, African American, or who have hypertension, it is suggested that they cut their sodium intake to 1500mg each day. Unfortunately, the average intake is much higher (approximately 5000 mg of sodium or 7-10 g of salt).

The benefit of reducing salt intake was reaffirmed by a study reported in the

January 2010 issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine*. Scientists from the University of California, San Francisco, Departments of Medicine of Stanford University and Columbia University used the *Coronary Heart Disease Policy Model* to calculate benefits for a population-wide reduction in dietary salt up to 3 grams (1200 mg of sodium) /day. Using this model which analyzed the results from previous studies to estimate the benefit of reducing dietary sodium's impact on blood pressure and its impact on heart disease, they projected there would be 54,000-99,000 fewer heart attacks and 44,000-92,000 fewer deaths from all causes each year if Americans would limit their consumption of salt by even ½ teaspoon/day. The body of evidence that reducing sodium can have a significant population-wide health benefit is growing and has gained

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the support of the American Medical Association, the American Heart Association, the American Society of Hypertension and the World Health Organization.

*What foods have the most sodium?*

Commercially prepared foods such as tomato sauce, soups, canned foods, prepared mixes, deli meats, and salad dressings are often very high in sodium. Even breads and crackers can have considerable amount of hidden sodium.

Although our taste buds have become accustomed to a

high level of salt in the typical diet, this preference can be modified—but it takes time and patience. Some people can adjust to a lower sodium diet in just a few weeks. But for others it often takes months. Eventually foods that we used to enjoy can begin to taste too salty!

*What can the consumer do?*

Check the *Nutrition Facts Panel* on processed foods. Look for the % Daily Value. Foods that are listed as 5% or less sodium are low in sodium, 6%-20% are moderate and those above 20% are high. When choosing

processed foods, select low sodium choices if possible, and flavor with spices or other low sodium foods. A challenge can come when eating in a restaurant. However, times are changing and by voicing your preference for lower sodium foods when you eat out, you may begin to see healthier foods on the menus in your favorite restaurants. Small changes over time can reap real health benefits.

Source: N Engl J Med, 2010 Jan 20. Projected Effect of Dietary Salt Reductions on Future Cardiovascular Disease. Bibbins-Domingo K, Chertow GM, Coxson PG, Moran A, Lightwood JM, Pletcher MJ, Goldman

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 3 pretzels (30g) Servings Per Container 13	
Amount Per Serving	
<b>Calories</b> 120	Calories from Fat 10
% Daily Value *	
<b>Total Fat</b> 1g	<b>2 %</b>
Saturated Fat 0g	<b>0 %</b>
Trans Fat 0g	
<del>Cholesterol 0mg</del>	<del>0 %</del>
<del>Sodium</del> 120mg	<del>5 %</del>
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 24g	<b>8 %</b>
Dietary Fiber 1g	<b>4 %</b>
Sugars 1g	
<b>Protein</b> 3g	
Vitamin A	<b>0 %</b>
Vitamin C	<b>0 %</b>
Calcium	<b>0 %</b>
Iron	<b>0 %</b>

**5% or less is Low**

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 oz (28g /About 17 pretzels) Servings Per Container 15	
Amount Per Serving	
<b>Calories</b> 110	Calories from Fat 10
% Daily Value *	
<b>Total Fat</b> 1g	<b>2 %</b>
Saturated Fat 0g	<b>0 %</b>
Trans Fat 0g	
<del>Cholesterol 0mg</del>	<del>0 %</del>
<del>Sodium</del> 560mg	<del>23 %</del>
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 23g	<b>8 %</b>
Dietary Fiber 1g	<b>3 %</b>
Sugars 1g	
<b>Protein</b> 2g	
Vitamin A	<b>0 %</b>
Vitamin C	<b>0 %</b>
Calcium	<b>0 %</b>
Iron	<b>1 %</b>

**20% or more is High**

**Table salt is approximately 40% sodium.**

Calculation:

3g salt=3000 mg salt  
(40% of salt=sodium)  
40% x 3000mg=1200mg sodium  
**1200 mg sodium=½ t. salt**  
**2300 mg sodium=1 t. salt**

For more information about healthy eating, contact your local extension office.

The Food Assistance Program can help people of all ages with low income buy nutritious foods for a better diet.

To find out more, call toll-free 1-888-369-4777.

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