

A Salty Q & A

Question: What's something that our bodies need to work right - conduct nerve impulses, enable muscles to contract and relax, and keep a healthy balance of fluid? If we get too much of it, it can cause increased blood pressure, damage to the heart muscle, heart failure or heart attack, stroke, injure kidneys or bones, and can even be a risk factor for cancer???

Answer: Sodium!

First off - Salt vs. Sodium. How are they different?

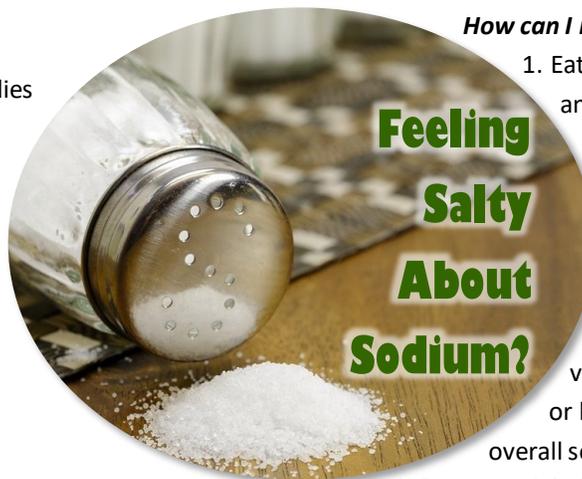
Salt is a mineral that is made up of 40% Sodium and 60% Chloride. It's the sodium part of the salt that most people need to watch.

Why should we be concerned? What does sodium do?

A little sodium is necessary for our bodies to function correctly. But...too much sodium can cause [problems](#), and Americans consume about 50% more sodium than is healthy. When we consume sodium in excess, our kidneys can't filter it all out. Our bodies hold on to water to try and dilute it. This causes an increase in the fluid surrounding our cells and in our bloodstream. The extra blood volume makes our hearts work too hard and puts harmful pressure on our blood vessels. Over time, this damage can make our blood vessels get stiff, and cause a cascade of damage.

Do I need to throw away my salt shaker?!

The good news: probably not. Most of the sodium in our diets doesn't come from whole, unprocessed foods, or even the salt that we add when we cook them. Instead, more than 70% of the sodium we consume comes from commercially prepared foods. The bad news: Americans are eating [more of these ultra-processed foods](#) than ever before. This means that most of our calories are now coming from foods that are industrially manufactured, ready-to-eat, and include plenty of additives but very little whole food. In other words, exactly the kinds of foods that are highest in added sodium.



How can I reduce the amount of sodium in my diet?

1. Eat more minimally processed foods: veggies and fruits, whole grains, and lean protein that hasn't been injected with sodium solutions.
2. Pay attention to the amount of ultra-processed food that you're eating and, whenever possible, minimize it.
3. Try "cutting" high-sodium food with low. For instance, add some no-salt veggies (fresh, frozen, or canned) to frozen or boxed pasta dishes. You've just reduced the overall sodium while adding fiber and nutrients.
4. Become a label reader! [Sodium is so sneaky](#) that high amounts are often found in foods that don't even taste that salty: bread and pastries, salad dressing, cheese, soup, or pudding.

What about "natural salt," like sea salt or Himalayan pink salt? Does it have less sodium?

[All salts](#) are still sodium chloride. They may be different colors or have slightly different flavors, but their nutrient content is virtually identical. If the granule size is small and similar, they can be used interchangeably. Larger granule salts, such as kosher salt, are best when sprinkled on at the end of cooking.

What about using salt substitutes when I cook?

Some substitutes replace sodium with herbs or spices, so you can use those with abandon! Others replace some, or all, of the sodium with potassium. This is fine for most people, but some people who have medical conditions (like kidney disease) or take certain medications should be cautious about the amount of potassium they consume. Talk to your health care provider before you make the switch to potassium-based substitutes.

But if the salt is reduced, won't my food taste bland?

There are lots of ways to prevent that. Manufacturers often add extra salt and sugar to try and disguise the fact that their foods are lacking in actual flavor. When you're cooking, first [dial-up flavors](#) with plenty of onions, garlic, herbs, spices, citrus, or vinegar, then add salt. It will probably take less than you expect and will taste better too!

Wondering where to start with reducing the sodium content in your diet? How about with the "Salty Six?"



DID YOU KNOW?

These six popular foods can add high levels of sodium to your diet.

As part of a healthy dietary pattern that emphasizes the intake of vegetables, fruits, nuts, whole grains, lean vegetable or animal protein, and fish and minimizes the intake of trans fats, red meat and processed red meats, refined carbohydrates, and sugary drinks, the American Heart Association recommends 2,300 milligrams (mgs) or less a day of sodium.*



Daily suggested sodium referenced below is based on 2,300 mgs/day recommendation:

1. Bread and Rolls

The next time you're grocery shopping, take a look at the nutrition labels of several [different brands of bread](#). You'll be astounded by how much the sodium levels vary!

2. Pizza

Pizza is the #2 leading source of sodium in American diets. Again, check the labels. Some [frozen pizzas](#) have 75% more sodium than others.

3. Sandwiches & Burgers

It makes sense why these would be #3 on the list. Salty bread, salty meat, salty cheese, and salty condiments all add up to a sodium bomb!

4. Cold Cuts and Cured Meats

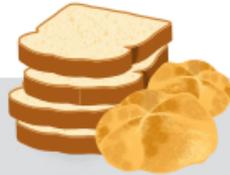
Because many microorganisms can't survive in a salty environment, salt has been used for thousands of years to preserve foods, especially meats. Keep in mind though that a 2oz. serving size is only about 6 thin slices, and that little bit can contain up to 1/3 of your daily sodium!

5. Soup

One cup (not one whole can - just one cup!) of [canned soup](#) can have more than a third of your daily sodium. Check labels carefully when shopping, and add some fresh or frozen vegetables to dilute the sodium while adding flavor and nutrition. Better yet, start from scratch and customize with your favorite ingredients — and a lot less salt.

6. Burritos and Tacos

The topping and fillings in [burritos and tacos](#) can really pack a sodium-filled punch. One Chipotle burrito can burn through 1.5 times your daily sodium. Packing them full of veggies can help reduce the impact, and DIY fillings (without high-sodium flavoring packets) are tastier, healthier, and less expensive.



BREADS & ROLLS

Some foods that you might eat throughout the day, such as bread, can add up to a lot of sodium even though each serving may not seem high in sodium.

1



PIZZA

A slice pepperoni pizza can contain almost a third of your daily recommended dietary sodium. Try swapping in veggies to your next slice.

2



SANDWICHES

A sandwich or burger from a fast food restaurant can contain more than 100 percent of your daily suggested dietary sodium. Try half a sandwich with a side salad instead.

3



COLD CUTS & CURED MEATS

One 2 oz. serving, or 6 thin slices, of deli meat can contain as much as a third of your daily recommended dietary sodium. Build a sandwich with fresh vegetables such as lettuce, tomatoes, avocados, and bell peppers.

4



SOUP

Sodium in one cup of canned soup of the same variety can range from 49 to 830 milligrams — more than a third of your daily recommended intake. Check the labels to find lower sodium varieties.

5



BURRITOS & TACOS

Taco toppings and burrito fillings can pack a big sodium punch. Choose burritos and tacos that are full of veggies and lean sources of protein.

6

Kids and Sodium

[Kids and teens](#) in the US are eating way too much sodium as well. Like adults, the majority of calories in their diets (67%) now come from ultra-processed foods. That means that right at the time they're growing quickly and forming dietary habits that will impact their health for the rest of their lives, many young people are primarily eating low-nutrient, high-sugar, high-sodium foods.

The same tips that can help adults to keep sodium levels within a healthy range will [help kids too](#). Involving kids in the planning, purchasing, and preparation of food can improve the nutrition of your family's meals, while it provides them with important skills and habits they'll take with them into adulthood.

If you have questions or concerns about your or your child's sodium intake, talk to your provider at Sawtooth Mountain Clinic!