

# Sodium

## What is sodium?

It is a mineral found naturally in food and a part of salt.

## Why do we need it?

Our bodies need sodium to maintain fluid balance, control blood pressure, keep our nerves working, and help our muscles relax. Some people are very sensitive to sodium. Their blood pressure may go up with added salt and salty foods. People can also gain water weight with added salt and salty foods.

## How much do we need?

- Everyone, including kids, should reduce their sodium intake to **less than 2,300 milligrams** of sodium a day (**less than 1 teaspoon of salt**).
- Adults age 51 and older, African Americans of any age, and individuals with high blood pressure, diabetes, or chronic kidney disease should further reduce their sodium intake to **1,500 milligrams** of sodium a day (**about 1/2 teaspoon of salt**).

## How can you control your sodium intake?

### Read the Nutrition Facts Label.

- Look for the total amount of sodium and the % Daily Value (DV). If the Daily Value is 5% or less, the sodium amount is low. If it is 20% or more, then the sodium amount is high for that product.



## **Eat more fresh foods and limit pre-packaged or processed foods.**

- Fresh foods are generally lower in sodium. Food that is pre-packaged or processed (food in cans, boxes, or packages) is higher in sodium.
- Eat highly processed foods **less often** and in **smaller portions**, especially cheesy foods, such as pizza; cured meats, such as bacon, sausage, hot dogs, and deli luncheon meats; and ready-to-eat-foods, like canned chili, ravioli, and soups.
- Buy foods lower in sodium or foods labeled “low sodium,” “reduced sodium,” or “no salt added.”

## **Avoid adding salt while cooking *and* at the table.**

- Use spices, herbs, garlic, vinegar, or lemon juice to season foods or use no-salt seasoning mixes. Try black or red pepper, basil, curry, ginger, or rosemary.

## **Adjust your taste buds.**

- Cut back on salt little by little and pay attention to the natural tastes of foods. Always taste your food before adding salt. Your taste for salt will lesson over time.

## **Be aware that some over-the-counter medications may contain substantial amounts of sodium.**

