



BalanceHealth Newsletter

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The Great Salt Debate

There are two sides to every story and salt's sordid tale is no exception. There are countless health warnings to avoid salt, yet it is a nutrient that is found in the vast majority of foods and beverages that we consume.

The Good:

In reality, salt is an essential nutrient that helps maintain good health. Salt is crucial for regulating blood pressure, maintaining the correct balance of fluids in the body, and assisting with muscle and nerve function. The National Academy of Sciences recommends that healthy adults consume a minimum of 500mg of sodium per day. Most people have no trouble reaching this daily minimum as salt is so abundant, which is why there is little discussion or concern over people getting enough salt in their diets.

The Bad:

The concern lies in the overconsumption of sodium. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend limiting salt consumption to less than 2,300 mg per day or 1,500 mg per day if you are over 51 years old or if you have high blood pressure, diabetes, or chronic kidney disease. However, the average American consumes over 3,400 mg, which is way above daily limits. Salt consumption in America has increased by 50% over the past four

decades. With the increased prevalence of salt in our diets, our taste buds have adapted and we now crave much higher levels of salt than what is needed to remain healthy.

The Ugly:

Consuming too much salt can lead to serious health problems. Excessive sodium in the body can cause an increase in blood volume, which makes your heart work harder and contributes to high blood pressure. This in turn can lead to heart disease and/or stroke. Cardiovascular events such as these are a major cause of premature death and cost Americans upwards of \$300 billion per year in medical costs and lost productivity.

According to the American Medical Association, as many as 150,000 premature deaths could be prevented each year if Americans reduced their daily salt intake by half. Even small reductions can help. Research presented at the American Heart Association's annual conference showed that even a reduction of 1 gram of salt per day could save as many as 200,000 lives over the course of a decade. So the question becomes where is all this salt coming from and how can I avoid over-consuming.

For more information or advice about salt contact your Wellness Coordinator by calling

1.800.327.2255

eni's BalanceHealth program is a confidential service provided by your employer to help you achieve and maintain a healthy lifestyle.





Sodium Content/Sources:

You may think you're in the clear if you don't usually add table salt to food or eat typically salty foods like pretzels, but salt can be found in large quantities in unsuspected places, such as bagels, which contain over 500mg of sodium.

According to the FDA the breakdown of salt in the American diet falls into three main categories and the percentages may surprise you. 10% of our total salt intake comes from foods that naturally contain sodium such as vegetables, dairy products, meat, and shellfish. Another 5%-10% of our total salt intake comes from salt that we add to foods either while eating or while cooking. A whopping 75% of our total salt intake comes from processed and prepared foods such as bread, pizza, microwave dinners, canned soups, fast food, cold cuts, and most food prepared by restaurants. It is not uncommon for a three course meal at a restaurant to contain over 15 grams of salt, which is almost three times the daily limit.

Taking Control:

It is a good idea to read labels when buying packaged foods and try to avoid foods that contain over 200mg of sodium per serving. Since overconsumption of salt is such a hot button issue right now many manufacturers are putting sodium-related terms on their packaging, which can sometimes be misleading. Here is a breakdown of what each term actually means to avoid being duped:

Sodium or Salt Free – Each serving contains less than 5mg of sodium per serving.

Very Low Sodium – Each serving contains 35mg of sodium or less.

Low Sodium – Each serving contains 140 mg of sodium or less.

Reduced or Less Sodium – The product contains 25% less sodium than the regular version, check actual label as this could still be high.

Light Sodium – The product contains 50% less sodium than the regular version, check actual label as this could still be high.

Unsalted or No Salt Added – There was no salt

added during processing, but the food may still naturally contain high sodium levels, so be sure to check the actual label.

Besides reading labels, other tactics to ensure that your salt consumption remains within healthy limits include:

Eat more “Whole” Fresh Foods – Fresh fruits and vegetable are naturally low in sodium. Fresh unprocessed meat is much lower in sodium than lunchmeats, hot dogs, bacon, sausage, and ham.

Cook – Making homemade sauces, soups, dinners, and even desserts, will drastically reduce the amount of salt you consume as the vast majority of additional salt in our diets comes from pre-packaged foods and going out to eat.

Remove Salt from Recipes – Leaving salt out of recipes for most main dishes such as casseroles, stews, sauces, etc, will generally not alter the flavor too much (baked goods are an exception and should not be altered). You could also pick up a cookbook that focuses on lowering high blood pressure for some delicious low sodium recipes.

Increase the use of Herbs & Spices – Instead of using salt for added flavoring try substituting spices, herbs, and fruit juices to zest up your meals.

Remember, salt is vital to your health, but moderation is key. Because of our hectic lifestyles, salt has become heavily imbedded in our diets. Practice being diligent about your sodium consumption and gradually cut back if you think that you're over-consuming. Your cravings for excess salt will begin to diminish and your sodium consumption will be in the healthy range.

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