

**Q.** How much sodium do you need in your diet and when dieting, should it be the same or less?

**A.** Sodium is the primary electrolyte (mineral) in the fluid part of the blood and around body cells. It is essential for helping the body stay properly hydrated, regulating plasma volume, nerve impulses, and muscle contraction. The minimum requirement for sodium is about 500 mg per day. The typical American eats about 3,000-5,000 mg of sodium daily. As you can see, people generally eat too much sodium and need to cut back to the recommended level of less than 2,300 mg/day (less than 1,500 mg/day if you are 50 years old or older, have high blood pressure, or you are African American).

A new study on salt in the diet led researchers to estimate that if people reduced their sodium intake by 1,200 mg/day – to an intake of 1,500 – we would accomplish the following:

1. Reduce new cases of heart disease by 60,000–120,000 new cases yearly in the U.S.
2. Prevent 32,000–66,000 strokes yearly.
3. Prevent 54,000–99,000 heart attacks yearly.
4. Reduce the number of deaths from any cause by 44,000–92,000 annually.

Eating too much sodium (above the recommended levels) can result in health problems, such as high blood pressure,



and contributes to osteoporosis (because sodium increases calcium excretion). When losing weight, the body often retains water. Following these lower intakes (less than 1,500 mg/day) is desirable during weight loss.

To lower your intake of sodium, use less salt and eat fewer salty foods such as chips, pretzels, pickles, canned soups and canned vegetables, soy sauce, gravies, salad dressing, catsup, and processed foods. About 77% of the salt most people eat is already added to the food by food manufacturers (see examples below), 6% is added at the table, 5% added during cooking, and only 12% is found naturally in whole, unprocessed foods. Read labels to see how much salt has been added to foods. If you eat fresh fruits and vegetables, they are very low in sodium. Most only have 2-5 mg per serving fresh.

Research shows that people who eat less salt (sodium) have lower rates of blood pressure, heart attacks, congestive heart failure, kidney disease, strokes, and live longer than those who eat freely of sodium.

Source: USDA, Dietary Guidelines for Americans, website accessed Feb. 2010. New England Journal of Medicine. 2010 Feb 18;362:590-599.

Sodium Content of Common Foods			
Food	Sodium (mg)	Food	Sodium (mg)
Table Salt , 1 tsp	2,358	Deli ham, 1 oz	341
Pickles, dill, 1 large	1,731	Deli turkey breast, 1 oz	335
Canned chicken soup, 1 cup	850	Soy sauce, 1 tsp	304
Pizza, 1 piece	800	Cheese, American, 1 oz	304
Sauerkraut, 1/2 cup	780	Cornflakes, 1 cup	298
Pretzels, 1 oz	486	Deli bologna	295
Cottage cheese, 1/2 cup	459	Olives, black, 5 large	192
Sardines, 3 oz	429	Potato chips, 1 oz	183

*Recommended intake less than 2,300 mg/day (less than 1,500 mg/day if age 50, if your blood pressure is elevated 120/80+, and for African Americans.)*

