

Choose MyPlate: Reduce Your Sodium¹

Ashley Hamm, Karla P. Shelnett, and Gail P. A. Kauwell²

In 2011, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) released a new symbol called MyPlate that represents recommendations from the *2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. MyPlate is a tool developed to help Americans improve their eating habits.

Reducing sodium intake is one of the MyPlate recommendations for healthy eating. Most Americans eat more sodium than they need, which can have negative health effects. This publication provides facts about sodium and why reducing sodium intake is important. It also provides easy tips to reduce your sodium intake.

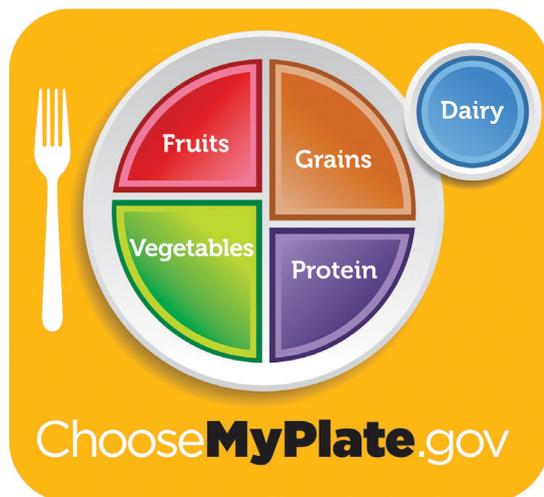


Figure 1. USDA's MyPlate recommends that Americans reduce the sodium in their diets. This fact sheet contains information about sodium and tips to reduce your sodium intake.

Credits: <http://choosemyplate.gov>

What Is Sodium?

Sodium is a mineral needed in small amounts by our bodies to work properly. It helps with fluid balance, nerve function, and muscle action (Mayo Clinic, 2011). We get most of our sodium from the foods we eat. However, if you eat too much sodium, it can be unhealthy for your body. The most common source of sodium in the diet is salt. This includes salt added to food during cooking and at the table. It also includes salt already in foods.



Figure 2. Our bodies need the mineral sodium to work properly, but too much can be unhealthy. Most of the sodium in our diets comes from salt.

Credits: iStockphoto

1. This document is FCS80027, one of a series of the Department of Family, Youth, and Community Sciences, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. First published April 2013. Please visit the EDIS website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
2. Ashley Hamm, dietetic intern, Master of Science–Dietetic Internship Program, Food Science and Human Nutrition Department, Karla P. Shelnett, PhD, RD, assistant professor, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, and Gail P. A. Kauwell, PhD, RD, LDN, professor, Food Science and Human Nutrition Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A&M University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating. Nick T. Place, Dean

How Much Should I Be Getting?

Most healthy individuals need no more than 1,500 milligrams of sodium per day. As you age, the amount of sodium you need decreases. Adults from age 51 to 70 need 1,300 milligrams per day, and those over 70 need 1,200 milligrams per day (Institute of Medicine, 2005).

How Much Is Too Much?

Most Americans eat much more sodium than they need. To avoid health risks associated with eating too much sodium, children and healthy adults age 50 and under should try to lower their sodium intake to less than 2,300 milligrams per day. If you are over 50, African-American, or have high blood pressure, diabetes, or chronic kidney disease, you should not eat more than 1,500 milligrams of sodium per day (USDA, 2011). Just one teaspoon of table salt contains over 2,300 milligrams of sodium (Mayo Clinic, 2011).

Many Americans find it hard to limit their sodium intake to less than this amount, but it is possible. As you start to lower your sodium intake, your taste buds will adjust. Eventually you will find that you'll need less sodium to be satisfied.

Why Should I Reduce My Sodium Intake?

If you eat too much sodium, it can cause high blood pressure. High blood pressure makes your heart work harder. This can lead to serious health problems such as heart disease, kidney disease, and stroke (Mayo Clinic, 2011). If you have high blood pressure, reducing your sodium intake, along with eating a well-balanced diet, may help reduce your blood pressure to normal levels (FDA, 2010).

How Can I Lower My Sodium Intake?

Lowering your sodium intake is possible! Use the following tips to help you reduce your sodium intake.

Know Your Foods

The first step to reduce your sodium intake is to know where your sodium is coming from. The main sources of sodium in a typical diet come from three places. Sodium is found naturally in foods such as vegetable and dairy products. Sodium is also added to processed foods like bread, pizza, and fast food. Lastly, sodium can be added to foods during cooking or at the table by using table salt or

condiments. Table 1 provides a list of foods high in sodium and foods lower in sodium.

Table 1. Examples of high-sodium and low-sodium foods.

High-Sodium Foods	Low-Sodium Foods
Canned vegetables, soups, and bean	Fresh and canned fruits Fresh vegetables and canned vegetables that say "No Salt Added," "Low-Sodium," or "Reduced Sodium" on the label
Sausages/cured meats, canned meats, and lunch meats	Fresh meats (poultry, beef, seafood, pork) and eggs
Sauces and condiments (soy sauce, mustard, ketchup, salted butter)	Vinegar, "low-sodium" dressings, mayonnaise, and unsalted butter
Salted nuts	Unsalted nuts
Cheeses	Fat-free milk, low-fat milk, yogurt, and ice cream
Pre-packaged or instant meals	"No Salt Added" or "Low-Sodium" pre-packaged foods
Salted popcorn, crackers, chips, and pretzels	Unsalted popcorn, crackers, pretzels, and chips

Read the Label

The Nutrition Facts label is printed on all packaged food products. The amount of sodium per serving of food is listed on the label. Make sure you pay attention to the serving size on the label. Most packages of food contain more than one serving. The sodium content is given in both milligrams (mg) per serving and % Daily Value.



Figure 3. Read the Nutrition Facts label to find out how much sodium is in the foods you are eating. If the sodium content is greater than 20%, then the sodium is high.

Credits: iStockphoto

A sodium content greater than 20% (480 milligrams) is high. A sodium content of less than 5% (120 milligrams) is low (FDA, 2010) (For more information on how to read a food label, see the EDIS publication FY1127/FCS8883 *Healthy Eating: Understanding the Nutrition Facts Label* at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fy1127>). You can reduce your sodium intake by choosing foods lower in sodium. Also,

look for labels that say “low sodium,” “reduced sodium,” “unsalted” and “no salt added.” While these products may still contain some sodium, they are lower in sodium than “regular-sodium” products.

Choose Fresh

Processing increases the sodium content of foods. These foods include canned soups, lunch meats, and cheese. Instead, try fresh versions of these foods to lower the amount of sodium you eat. These foods include fresh fruits and vegetables, unsalted nuts, dried beans, whole grains, and fresh meats.

Savor Home-Cooked Meals

Know what is in your food! The best way to know what you are eating is to prepare it yourself. Choose low-sodium ingredients, and limit the amount of salt and other sodium-containing ingredients and seasonings you add. By doing this you can easily lower the amount of sodium in your diet.

Get Creative!

Instead of adding salt or high-sodium condiments to your foods, use tasty spices, herbs, garlic, lemon juice, or vinegar. Using these instead of salt will reduce your sodium intake without losing taste. Be careful, however, because some spices and seasonings are higher in sodium. Higher-sodium seasonings include chili powder, taco seasoning, bouillon, seasoning salts (such as garlic salt and onion salt), and monosodium glutamate (MSG) (Foods High In.net, 2012).

All types of salts, including sea salt, pink salt, rock salt, and other “exotic” salts, have nearly the same sodium content as regular table salt. If salt is in the name of the seasoning or the ingredient list, it is probably high in sodium. There are many delicious, lower-sodium spices available that can add flavor to your food. Try using curry, pepper, rosemary, basil, oregano, cilantro, paprika, dill, or any other fresh herb that sounds good. So get creative! You may discover new tastes and recipes you like.

Summary

Our bodies need sodium to work properly. However, most Americans eat too much sodium. Eating too much sodium can lead to serious health problems. To lower your risk for these problems, follow the MyPlate recommendation to reduce your sodium intake. Following the simple suggestions provided in this publication will help you reduce your sodium intake.



Figure 4. Instead of salt, use different spices such as pepper, basil, cilantro, or oregano to give flavor to your dishes. To lower your sodium intake, avoid using spices with salt in the name or on the ingredients list.

Credits: Brand X Pictures

Recommended Resources

To learn more about reducing your sodium intake, contact the UF/IFAS Extension Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) educator in your county. Contact information can be found in the blue pages of your telephone book or online at <http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/map>.

USDA's MyPlate - This site contains information regarding USDA's MyPlate and information about all of the food groups. <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/>.

USDA Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010 - This document contains evidence-based information and nutrition recommendations. <http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/Publications/DietaryGuidelines/2010/PolicyDoc/PolicyDoc.pdf>.

U.S. Food and Drug Administration: Lowering Salt in Your Diet - This article provides information about why reducing sodium intake is important. It also discusses the FDA's regulation of nutrition labels and foods containing salt. <http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm181577.htm>.

Nutrition for Health and Fitness: Sodium in Your Diet

- Published by UF/IFAS Extension, this article contains evidence-based information related to sodium in our diets. It also includes additional tips for reducing your sodium intake. <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/he696>.

References

Foods High In.net. (2012). Nuts, seeds, and spices high in sodium. Retrieved from <http://foods-high-in.net/foods-high-in-sodium/nuts-seeds-and-spices,8.html>

Institute of Medicine. (2005). Dietary reference intakes for water, potassium, sodium, chloride, and sulfate. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

Mayo Clinic. (2011). Sodium: How to tame your salt habit now. Retrieved from <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/sodium/NU00284/NSECTIONGROUP=2>

United States Department of Agriculture. (2011, June). Salt and sodium: 10 tips to help you cut back. Retrieved from <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/food-groups/downloads/TenTips/DGTipsheet14SaltAndSodium.pdf>

U.S. Food and Drug Administration. (2010, May 18). Lowering salt in your diet. Retrieved from <http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm181577.htm>