

The Truth About Salt: How to Avoid One of the World's Most Dangerous Silent Killers

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What is salt?

Salt is a mineral composed of sodium and chloride; the element sodium is the main culprit when consumed in large doses. Our bodies need a healthy amount of salt to survive: the essential minerals in salt help with fluid balance, nerve transmission, and muscle function. Our kidneys regulate the amount of sodium in our bodies. Eating too much or too little sodium can cause high-risk health problems. If sodium levels in the body drop too low, a hormone called aldosterone is released, which retains sodium in the body by reducing the amount lost through urine, which can be dangerous over time.

How much salt is too much?

Most of us are consuming around 10 grams of salt per day, while adults should actually aim to consume no more than 4-6 grams of salt per day to avoid chronic disease (about 1 teaspoon). People with high blood pressure are specifically advised to reduce their salt intake to no more than 4 grams per day. Salt intake above the

recommended 4-6 grams is associated with high blood pressure; which in turn increases the risk of kidney disease and cardiovascular diseases such as heart disease and stroke.

The relationship between salt and the body

Related conditions that can occur from consuming too much sodium include:

Heart failure/heart attack

High blood pressure

Kidney problems and kidney stones

Stroke Stomach cancer

Left

ventricular hypertrophy (thickening of the heart muscle) Osteoporosis

Edema (fluid retention)

However, completely cutting salt out of your diet can be harmful. According to Healthline, a low-salt diet can have adverse health effects, such as increased LDL cholesterol levels, heart failure, and insulin resistance.



Foods high in salt

Most of the salt in the modern diet comes from restaurant foods and packaged, processed foods.

Some of the foods highest in sodium for adults and children:

1. Bread: sandwich bread, baguette, crusty bread
2. Processed meats: salami, bacon, smoked meats, ham, sausages
3. Salty snacks: potato chips, French fries, crackers, salted nuts
4. Cheese and cheese products: brie, cottage cheese, string cheese, cheddar cheese, mozzarella cheese
5. Cereal desserts: muffins, cakes, cookies
6. Soups: canned, frozen, powdered

Always check the labels and nutrition panels of packaged foods. They provide useful information about the product, including the sodium content per serving.

To easily identify low-sodium foods, look for terms like low sodium, very low sodium, or reduced sodium. You can also look up the amount of sodium per serving or 100 grams and compare this number to any product you're considering.



Ways to reduce sodium in your daily diet

Choose fresh foods over processed foods

Eat more fruits and vegetables. Skip or limit frozen dinners and other high-sodium foods like pizza, fast food, packaged mixes, and canned soups or broths. Choose fresh or frozen skinless poultry, fish, and lean meats instead of marinated, canned, smoked, brined, or salted varieties. That includes limiting or avoiding salty meats like bacon, ham, and cold cuts. Even seemingly harmless items like bread contain moderate amounts of sodium that can become a problem when eaten regularly. Prepare and eat more food at home, where you can control how much sodium is added — unlike at fast food and other restaurants.

Eat low- or no-sodium foods on a "low- or no-sodium" diet

Check the Nutrition Facts Panel external link on food containers to determine sodium content. Choose 'low,' 'reduced sodium,' or 'no salt added' versions of foods. You can even find reduced-sodium (or no-salt) versions of favorite snacks, such as potato chips and nuts, at many grocery stores.

Use more herbs and spices

Add flavor with herbs, spices, lemon, lime, vinegar, or salt-free seasoning blends instead of salt or salty seasonings like soy sauce, spice blends, or soup mixes. Start by cutting your salt intake in half and gradually switch to healthier alternatives.

Limit spices, "side dishes" and side dishes

Limit your use of condiments like salad dressings, ketchup, barbecue sauce, and hot sauce. Even consider limiting low-sodium soy sauce and teriyaki sauce, which should be used sparingly, like table salt. Salty 'side dishes' like pickles, pickled vegetables, olives, and sauerkraut should also be avoided.

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