

Ask Dr. Tastebud



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Dear Dr. Tastebud,

I was recently diagnosed with high blood pressure. My doctor told me that I really should be watching my sodium intake but did not go into much more detail than that. Could you give me a run down on sodium and possibly some suggestions to help me reduce my intake?

*Sincerely,
HYPER10SUN*

Dear HYPER10SUN,
The best way to give you a “run down” on sodium and how to reduce your intake would most likely be to highlight some of the finer points, so without further adieu...

Sodium's action in the body

Sodium is an absolutely essential mineral. It is the principle extracellular cation. This means that it helps maintain the health of every cell within our body. It also helps maintain a constant fluid balance, electrolyte balance, and pH balance. Sodium assists in the proper functioning of our nerves and muscles. If the body contained absolutely no sodium, one would not be able to sustain life. Fortunately, this is a very rare problem in the United States.

Sources of sodium

Americans generally take in far too much sodium, mostly in the form of salt that is added during processing or preparation. Approximately 77% of the sodium in the average comes from processed foods and restaurant foods. About 12% is found naturally in foods while a relatively small amount (about 5%) is added during cooking or at the table (about 6%). Other sources of sodium in the diet include sodium

bicarbonate (baking soda and baking powder), monosodium glutamate (Accent™ is a common form) and sodium nitrate (used to cure pork). The recommendation is to consume less than 2300 milligrams of sodium (about one teaspoon) per day. To show processing adds sodium consider the following:

Sodium comparisons

Chicken ½ breast 69 mg	Chicken pie 1 frozen 907 mg	Chicken noodle soup 1 c. 1107 mg	Chicken dinner – Fast food 2243 mg
Pork 3 oz. 59 mg	Bacon 4 slices 548 mg	Hot Dog 1 639 mg	Ham 3 oz. 1114 mg
Potato 1 5 mg	Potato chips 10 200 mg	Instant mashed potatoes, 1 c. 485 mg	Potato salad ½ c. 625 mg

<http://www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/foodnut/09354.html>

Label lingo

Food manufacturers have developed lower sodium versions of a number of foods. Look for lower sodium versions of your favorite foods:

Sodium Free – product contains 5 mg of sodium or less per serving

Very Low Sodium – product contains 35 mg of sodium or less per serving

Low Sodium – product contains 140 mg or less per serving

Reduced Sodium – product with the usual sodium content reduced by 25%

No Added Salt, Unsalted – no salt is added during processing but still may contain sodium

Sodium content of foods

Fresh fruits, vegetables, and meats are naturally low in sodium. Salt is needed to control the yeast in baked goods such as bread, but are still relatively low.

Condiments can add a significant amount of sodium. The Healthy Choice™ product line is lower in sodium than comparable foods such as canned soup and frozen dinners.

Food Item	Serving Size	Sodium mg
Egg, Fried	1 large	162
Peanuts, dry roasted	1 oz.	228
Tuna in water	3 oz.	300
American Cheese	1 oz.	443
Cottage Cheese, low fat	1 Cup	918
Milk (skim or 1%)	1 Cup	125
Canned tomato juice	¾ Cup	660
Canned soups	1 Cup	600-1,300
Frozen dinners	8 oz.	500-2,570
Catsup	1 T	175
Soy Sauce	1 tsp.	299
Cocktail Sauce	¼ Cup	570

<http://www.clevelandclinic.org>

While it is possible to find lower fat choices at fast food restaurants, sodium is still high. It is easy to get close to your sodium limit in a single meal.

Sodium content of a typical fast food meal

Food Item	Sodium (mg)
Grilled Chicken Club Sandwich	1,690
Large Fries	330
Catsup Packets (2)	200
Large Diet Coke (32 fl. oz.)	45
Total: 2,265	

Tips for reducing sodium in your diet

- rinse canned vegetables, beans and tuna or use fresh or frozen vegetables
- limit salt snacks like chips and pretzels
- omit added salt when cooking pasta or rice
- ask for dishes to be prepared without salt when eating out

Flavoring food without using salt

Try some of these spices and herbs:

Beef: bay leaf, onion, pepper, sage, thyme

Pork: garlic, onion, sage, pepper, oregano

Chicken: ginger, oregano, paprika, rosemary, sage, tarragon, thyme

Fish: curry powder, dill, dry mustard, lemon juice

Sample low sodium menu

	Sodium (mg)
Breakfast:	
1 cup Skim Milk	145
1 c strawberries	2
2 T Fat free cream cheese	200
½ whole wheat bagel	325
Snack:	
1 apple	0
¼ c Almonds	140
Lunch:	
1 orange	0
1 Whole wheat Pita	319
3 oz Tuna, light, canned w/o salt	42
¼ c tomatoes	2
¼ c Spinach, raw	5
1 c Cranberry juice, light	10
1 T mayonnaise, light	120
Snack:	
1 c cauliflower	30
2 T Vegetable Dip	150
Dinner:	
4 oz Chicken breast, boneless, skinless	230
1 sweet potato	65
1 whole wheat roll	206
½ c cucumber	0
½ peppers	1
Snack:	
¾ c Blueberries	1
1 c Fat Free Yogurt	160
Total:	2,148 mg

References:

2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
American Dietetic Association Nutrition Fact Sheet

