

# Eat Less Sodium for Your Health

Sodium is a hot topic these days, and for good reason. If you have high blood pressure, reducing sodium in your diet has been shown to lower blood pressure after only a few weeks. When combined with diet and exercise, it can also lower the amount of medication you need to get your blood pressure under control. Even if you do not have high blood pressure, decreasing the amount of sodium you have each day can lower your risk of a heart attack or stroke.

## How much sodium should you have each day?

You should have no more than 2,400 mg of sodium per day.

## How much sodium do you have each day?

The average American has between 3,500 and 5,000 mg of sodium a day. A surprising 80 percent comes from restaurant meals, fast food, and processed foods—not the salt shaker.

Take a look at this chart of mostly unprocessed foods. If you had all of them in one day, it would be just over 1,000 mg of sodium. That's already almost half of your daily budget. Adding salt while cooking or at the table could put you over your limit because ¼ teaspoon of salt has 500 mg of sodium!



Food	Amount	Average Sodium
Fruit	3 pieces	6 mg
Whole-wheat pasta	2½ cups	20 mg
Trans-fat-free margarine	3 teaspoons	90 mg
Fresh vegetables	2½ cups	100 mg
Chicken	6 ounces	120 mg
Milk	2 cups	220 mg
Whole-grain bread	3 slices	450 mg
<b>Total</b>		<b>1,006 mg</b>

If you also ate any of the popular restaurant or fast foods shown below, they could push you closer to your sodium limit for the day.

Food	Amount	Average Sodium
Double cheeseburger	1	1,400 mg
Breakfast burrito	1	1,500 mg
Turkey sub sandwich	6-inch	800 mg
Soft taco, beef	1	550 mg
Chicken burrito	1 large	1,050 mg
Chicken sandwich	1	1,100 mg
Orange chicken	6 oz. portion	750 mg

The amount of sodium in these common processed foods can also push you over your daily limit.

Food	Amount	Average Sodium
<b>BREADS, CEREALS</b>		
Biscuit	1	600 mg
Pancakes	3 (4 inches each)	700 mg
<b>CHEESE</b>		
American	1 ounce	270 mg
Cottage cheese	½ cup	440 mg
<b>CONDIMENTS</b>		
Salad dressing	2 tablespoons	300 mg
Salsa, bottled	¼ cup	300 mg
Soy sauce	1 tablespoon	1,000 mg
<b>CONVENIENCE FOODS</b>		
Corn, canned	½ cup	360 mg
Top Ramen	1 package	1,820 mg
<b>ENTREES</b>		
Cheese pizza	¼ of 12-inch pizza	785 mg
Chicken pot pie, frozen	8 ounces	890 mg
Chili with beans, canned	1 cup	1,260 mg
<b>MEAT PRODUCTS</b>		
Hot dog	1	510 mg
Lunch meat	1 slice	335 mg
Pork link	1	200 mg

## What are you willing to do to lower the amount of sodium you eat?

- Eat out less often. Aim for 1 day a week.
- Cook at home. Make extra and eat it for lunch the next day.
- Eat fewer processed, packaged, and canned foods.
- Look at the Nutrition Facts section on the labels of foods you eat often to see how much sodium you are getting.
- Eat more fresh foods, such as vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, peas, lentils, fish, chicken, and meats prepared without salt.
- Cut the amount of salt you add while cooking in half until you are not adding much, if any. Use herbs, spices, lemon juice, vinegar, balsamic vinegar, garlic, onions, wine, dry mustard, or Mrs. Dash instead.
- Cut the amount of salt you add at the table in half until you are not using any at all.

Your taste buds will get used to the lower amount of sodium in just 3 to 4 weeks.

**Remember that even a small decrease in sodium can have a big effect on your risk of a heart attack or stroke.**

