

Beyond the salt shaker



Sodium is a vital mineral for the human body. Without it, nerves and muscles would cease to function, the absorption of major nutrients would be impaired, and the body would not be able to maintain adequate water and mineral balance.

The problem with sodium is that Americans are consuming way too much of it—between 4,000 and 6,000 extra milligrams per day. Table salt is 40 percent sodium and one teaspoon of salt contains 2,300 milligrams of sodium.

Sodium can be a major dietary culprit when it comes to high blood pressure, so it's important to watch your sodium intake.

How much sodium is enough?

The American Heart Association recommends that for every 1,000 calories of food you eat, your sodium intake should be 1,000 milligrams or less and should not exceed the 3,300 milligram daily limit for adults. However, your sodium intake may also be dependent upon your medical condition and the prescriptions you take. People who have high blood pressure may be advised by their doctors to follow a low-sodium diet.

The sodium content of most foods is listed on the food label. Many fast foods, processed meats, and canned vegetables and soups contain lots of added sodium. The sodium content, shown as milligrams, or mg, can often differ significantly between similar foods or brands.

Turn the page for examples of sodium in common foods.



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Food Group	Amount	Range of Sodium Content (mg)	% Daily Value (% DV) ^a for Sodium
Breads, all types	1 oz	95 - 210	4 - 9
Frozen, plain cheese pizza	4 oz	450 - 1,200	19 - 50
Frozen vegetables, all types	½ cup	2 - 160	0 - 7
Salad dressing, regular fat, all types	2 Tbsp	110 - 505	5 - 21
Salsa	2 Tbsp	150 - 240	6 - 10
Soup (tomato), reconstituted	8 oz	700 - 1,260	29 - 53
Tomato juice	8 oz (~1 cup)	340 - 1,040	14 - 43
Potato chips ^b	1 oz (28.4g)	120 - 180	5 - 8
Tortilla chips ^b	1 oz (28.4g)	105 - 160	4 - 7
Pretzels ^b	1 oz (28.4g)	290 - 560	12 - 23

^a % Daily Values listed in this column are based on the food amounts listed in the table. The DV for sodium is 2,400 milligrams.

^b All snack foods are regular flavor, salted.

Source: Agricultural Research Service (ARS) Nutrient Database for Standard Reference, Release 17, and recent manufacturers' label data from retail market surveys. Serving sizes were standardized to be comparable among brands within a food. Pizza and bread slices vary in size and weight across brands.

Note: None of the foods in the Agriculture Research Service Nutrient Database or market surveys were labeled low-sodium products.

By knowing the basics about sodium content, you can shake the salt habit and take a common sense approach to including sodium in your diet.