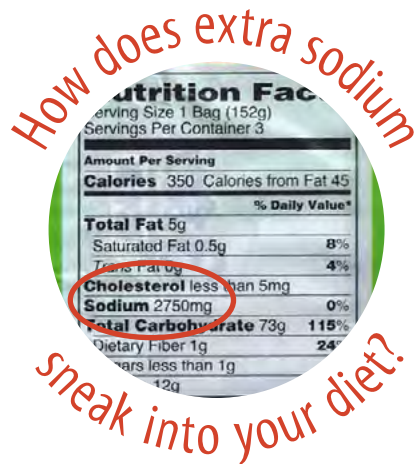


Q. How much sodium do I need in my diet?

A. The American Heart Association recommends limiting sodium (salt) to less than 1,500 mg per day. Your body needs sodium to stay properly hydrated, regulate plasma volume, nerve impulses, and muscle contraction. But too much sodium can harm your health.

Eating more than 1,500 mg of sodium a day increases your risk for high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, stomach cancer, and kidney disease. Too much sodium can even cause bone loss by preventing your body from absorbing calcium. Most people eat 3,000 to 5,000 mg of sodium per day. It's one of the reasons 1 in 3 adults in the United States has high blood pressure, and heart disease is the leading cause of death.

So where does all the excess sodium come from? Here are a few examples. A typical fast food hamburger topped with bacon and cheese served with French fries contains 1,000 to 2,000 mg of sodium. Breads, processed meats, pizza, and canned soups are all high



in sodium. Even a frozen microwave meal that might appear to be healthy contains an average of 500 to 1,200 mg of sodium in a single serving. Seasoning your foods with too much salt can also be part of the problem.

To lower the amount of sodium in your diet, use less salt and eat fewer salty foods such as chips, pretzels, pickles, canned soups, canned vegetables, soy sauce, gravies, salad dressing, ketchup, and processed foods. About 77 percent of the salt most people eat comes from processed foods.

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Eleven percent comes from the salt shaker or home-cooked meals. And only 12 percent is found naturally in whole, unprocessed foods.

Being aware of how much sodium you consume can help you improve your diet and your health. Read food labels and track how much sodium you consume. Use this information to see what foods you're eating that might be high in sodium. Adjust your diet and aim to eat less than 1,500 mg of sodium a day.

Eating more fruits and vegetables is one of the best ways to lower the amount of sodium in your diet. Most fresh fruits and vegetables only have 2 to 5 mg of sodium per serving naturally. Research shows that people who eat less sodium have lower rates of blood pressure, heart attacks, kidney disease, strokes, and live longer than those who eat a diet high in sodium.

*American Heart Association.
U.S. Department of Agriculture.
New England Journal of Medicine
Harvard School of Public Health.*

