

# Shake the Salt Habit



**CHALLENGE**  
Choose low-sodium foods.

## Requirements to Complete this HEALTH CHALLENGE™

1. Read "Shake the Salt Habit."
2. To complete the challenge, choose low-sodium foods on at least 22 days this month.
3. Keep a record of your completed challenge in case your organization requires documentation.



In a world where convenience is king, fast food, meals-in-a-box, and grab-and-go snacks represent a multi-billion dollar industry. Fast food restaurants alone serve up an estimated \$164 billion in hamburgers, French fries, soft drinks, and milk shakes each year. And retail sales of salty snack foods like potato chips and

pretzels top \$64 billion a year. These foods may be quick and convenient, but eating too much salty or high-sodium food can also put you on the fast track to high blood pressure, heart disease and early death.

If your diet is similar to the average American's, you're loading up on far too much sodium/salt. In one year, the average adult consumes 20 pounds of French fries, 23 pounds of pizza, and 53 gallons of soft drinks. Tally up the salt content in these foods, and it's equivalent to eating 2.7 pounds of sodium, more than 50 percent the recommended intake.

Consuming too much sodium is one reason heart disease and strokes are among the leading causes of death in the United States. But it doesn't have to be. You can learn to improve your diet, skip adding salt to the foods you eat, and consume less processed foods. Take the month-long Health Challenge and Shake the Salt Habit.

## Take the Sodium/Salt Quiz

How much do you know about the health benefits of reducing sodium/salt in your diet? Take this quiz to find out.

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1.   Too much sodium in your diet can increase blood pressure and the risk for heart disease and stroke.
2.   You can lower your blood pressure in just a few days, by reducing the amount of sodium in your diet.
3.   You need some sodium in your diet to help control blood pressure, absorb nutrients from food, and support nerve and muscle function.
4.   The average adult should consume less than 1,500 mg of sodium/salt per day.
5.   Canned soups, microwave meals, soft drinks, and bread do not contain high levels of sodium.

If you answered any of these statements incorrectly, you may benefit from learning more about how to reduce sodium in your diet. The average adult should consume less than 1,500 mg of sodium per day. Most Americans consume at least twice that amount of sodium daily from poor food choices. Fortunately, eating more plant-based foods low in sodium will protect your heart and keep your blood pressure under control.

Source: *National Institutes of Health.*

1. True 2. False 3. True 4. True 5. False

## Why eat less salt?

A recent study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that most Americans consume about 3,400 mg of sodium a day. This is more than double the daily recommended amount of 1,500 mg of sodium per day.

People in the United Kingdom, Canada, and other industrialized countries also consume more salt than they need. Japan tops the list, with an average sodium intake of 15,000 mg daily per person. Japan also has a high prevalence of hypertension and the highest percentage of strokes in the industrialized world.

Research shows that if you consume too much salt, you increase your risk for:



- **High blood pressure.** About 1 in 3 adults in the U.S. have high blood pressure. This condition forces the heart to work harder to circulate blood throughout your body. Over time, high blood pressure can damage your heart and arteries, lead to plaque build-up, and cause a heart attack or stroke.



• **Kidney disease.** High blood pressure, often caused by too much sodium, can damage the small blood vessels in the kidneys and increase the risk for kidney stones. Damage to your kidneys can also lead to excessive tiredness, water retention, shortness of breath, and excessive urination.



• **Osteoporosis.** If you consume high levels of sodium, this may increase your risk for poor bone health. High levels of sodium consumption can limit the amount of calcium your bones absorb and make them weaker and more prone to injury.



• **Eye disease.** High blood pressure and a diet with too much sodium can damage the small blood vessels in the eyes. This condition limits the amount of oxygen your eyes receive and can lead to vision loss.

## Tips for Eating Less Salt

If you want to follow the recommendation to consume less than 1,500 mg of sodium per day, you need to watch what you eat. It's important to keep in mind that more than 70 percent of a person's salt intake comes from processed foods. If you skip sprinkling salt on your food, it's probably not enough to cut the salt in your diet. But there are many things you can do to reduce the amount of sodium you consume:

- ✓ **Read food labels.** Read the Nutrition Facts label on the packaging to determine the sodium content. Choose foods that have less than 100 mg of sodium per serving. Limit frozen dinners, pizza, packaged mixes, canned soups, and salad dressings.



### Where's the sodium?

Only a small amount of sodium occurs naturally in foods. Most is added during processing. Compare sodium levels in these foods:

- 1 Cup canned green beans: **354 mg**
- 1 Cup fresh green beans: **1 mg**
- 1 Cup canned peas: **428 mg**
- 1 Cup frozen peas: **8 mg**
- 1 Cup canned corn: **571 mg**
- 1 ear of corn on the cob: **3 mg**



- ✓ **Buy fresh or frozen.** When it comes to fruits and vegetables, fresh or frozen is best. Canned and processed foods typically contain significantly higher levels of sodium. If you do buy canned foods, always rinse before preparing to remove excess sodium.
- ✓ **Limit fast food.** Many popular fast food restaurants serve hamburgers or fried foods that contain more than 1,000 mg of sodium in a single serving. Look up restaurant menu nutritional information before placing an order.
- ✓ **Go lean.** If you eat meat, go

lean by eating fresh poultry, fish, and lean meat rather than canned, smoked, or processed types.

- ✓ **Be home for breakfast.** Instead of ordering breakfast on the go, make time to eat your morning meal at home. Choose low-sodium cereals, or cook low-sodium oatmeal or wheat cereal.
- ✓ **Be spicy instead of salty.** In cooking and at the table, flavor foods with herbs, spices, lemon, lime, or salt-free seasoning blends instead of extra salt.
- ✓ **Cook rice, pasta, and hot cereals without salt.** Cut back on instant or flavored rice, pasta, and cereal mixes which usually have added salt. (If it tastes too flat, just add a little LiteSalt™ or other salt substitute.)
- ✓ **Choose low-salt snacks.** If you feel like you're having a salt craving, satisfy your tastebuds with unsalted pretzels, unsalted nuts mixed with raisins, graham crackers, low-fat or fat-free yogurt, plain popcorn, fruit, or raw vegetables.

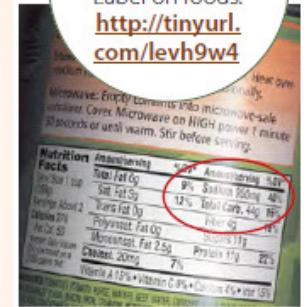
Take the test to find out how much sodium you consume:  
[www.projectbiglife.ca/sodium/](http://www.projectbiglife.ca/sodium/)

## Low-Sodium Diet Reduces Risk Factors

In the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) study, researchers wanted to find if a plant-based diet could lower blood pressure. They followed 459 people with high blood pressure for eight weeks and monitored their diet and sodium intake. They found that eating a healthy diet of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and small amounts of meat, poultry, fish, and nuts effectively lowered blood pressure. This low-sodium diet also reduced the risk for heart disease by 15 percent and stroke by 27 percent.



Learn about reading the Nutrition Facts Label on foods:  
<http://tinyurl.com/levh9w4>



Follow the DASH Diet to reduce salt intake:  
[tinyurl.com/dc87g](http://tinyurl.com/dc87g)

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.; National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey.; National Institutes of Health.; American Heart Association.; National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute.; Ottawa Hospital Research Institute.; U.S. Food and Drug Administration.



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## Instructions

1. Post this calendar where you will see it daily (bathroom, kitchen, bedroom, etc.).
2. Record the number of days you choose low-sodium foods.
3. Use the calendar to record the actions and choices you make to help lowering your sodium intake become a regular part of your life.
4. At the end of the month, total the number of days you chose low-sodium foods. You must do this on at least 22 days this month to complete this challenge. Then keep up this practice for a lifetime of best health.

MONTH: _____							HC = Health Challenge™ ex. min. = exercise minutes
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	Weight & weekly summary
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\_\_\_\_\_ Number of days this month I chose low-sodium foods

\_\_\_\_\_ Number of days this month I got 30+ minutes of physical activity such as brisk walking or biking

**Other wellness projects completed this month:**

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

