

Facts about Sodium¹

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Why do we need sodium?



Sodium is a mineral found in all body fluids. It is one of several minerals known as electrolytes. These minerals (potassium, sodium, and chloride) are

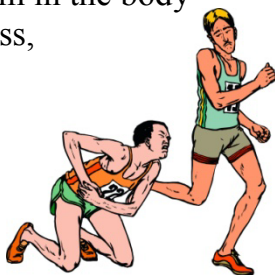
found in the fluids inside and outside of body cells. Sodium is important because it helps:

- regulate fluid balance
- regulate blood pressure
- send nerve signals
- control muscle contractions

What happens if we don't get enough sodium?

Sodium deficiency is very rare. People with kidney problems or excessive diarrhea or vomiting could have low sodium levels. Symptoms of low sodium in the body include, nausea, dizziness, and muscle cramps.

People who do heavy work or exercise in hot, humid climates can lose a lot of sodium in sweat. Sports drinks and foods can easily replace this lost sodium, along with other electrolytes.



How much sodium should we eat?

Most adults eat much more sodium than the body needs. The recommended intake levels for sodium are set at a level to provide enough sodium for the body and also allow food choices that will meet needs for other nutrients.

Life Stage	Amount (mg/day)*
Men and women, ages 19-50	1,500
Men and women, ages 51-70	1,300
Men and women, ages 71+	1,200
*mg = milligrams of sodium	

Is there a problem with having too much sodium in the diet?

Excess sodium consumption is one of several practices that can lead to high blood pressure. Other factors that can increase blood pressure are excess body weight, lack of exercise, low potassium intake, and excess alcohol intake.

High blood pressure is a risk factor for heart disease, kidney disease and stroke.



1. This document is FCS8806, one of a series of the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. First published: December 2006. Revised: March 2010. Please visit the EDIS Web site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
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High sodium intake also increases the amount of calcium lost in the urine. This can increase risk for osteoporosis, especially when calcium intake is low.

The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2005* recommend limiting daily sodium intake to 2,300 milligrams. Middle-aged and older adults, African Americans, and people with high blood pressure, should keep their sodium intake below 1,500 mg/day. The Daily Value (DV) on food labels is 2,400 milligrams, so keeping total daily sodium intake under 100% of the DV is a good idea.

Where is sodium found in the diet?

The American diet is high in sodium. Salt (sodium chloride) is the main source of sodium in foods. Salt is used as a food preservative and flavor enhancer. Ingredients such as baking soda, baking powder, brine, and soy sauce also contain sodium.

Processed and prepared foods have high amounts of sodium. Fresh and unprocessed



foods generally contain low amounts of sodium (see *Compare Sodium Content* table).

Read the Nutrition Facts on food labels to see how much sodium is in the products you buy. Choose foods with 5% or less of the DV often, and foods higher in sodium less often.

Compare Sodium Content

Unprocessed	Processed
Shredded Cabbage 13 mg/cup	Sauerkraut 360 mg/cup
Cucumber, 1 medium 6 mg	Pickles, 1 medium 1,730 mg
Fresh green beans 4 mg/cup	Canned green beans 350 mg/cup

High-sodium foods

Smoked or cured meats and fish (ham, bacon, corned beef, cold cuts)

Prepared salad dressings, condiments and relishes (catsup, mustard, olives)

Processed cheese and cheese spreads

Canned vegetables, soups and broths

Baking mixes, prepared entrees and other convenience foods

Where can I get more information?

The Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) agent at your county Extension office may have more written information and classes for you to attend. Also, a registered dietitian (RD) can provide reliable information to you.

Reliable nutrition information may be found on the Internet at the following sites:

<http://www.nutrition.gov>
<http://www.cdc.gov/salt/>
<http://www.cdc.gov/bloodpressure/>
<http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu>

