

Sodium

What Is It?

Sodium is a mineral that is essential for good health. You must have a balance of sodium and water in your body at all times. Too much sodium or too much or too little water will upset the balance.

Most of us eat far more sodium than we need—a little sodium goes a long way.

Food is often salted in preparation or at the table. Sodium is also added through food processing. When you understand the principles involved, you can really control your sodium intake.

Hypertension

Hypertension (or high blood pressure) is a major risk factor for heart disease and stroke. Individuals with hypertension often need to reduce sodium in their diet as a part of good blood pressure management.

The direct link between high sodium content causing hypertension is not definitive. It is thought that some individuals are salt sensitive and a high sodium intake for them could increase their chances of developing high blood pressure.

Other people seem to tolerate high levels of sodium with no effect. At the present time, there is no test to determine who is salt-sensitive.

Therefore, strict use of salt is advised.



What Can I Do?

There are a number of easy ways to monitor your sodium and salt intake.

- Read nutritional labels for sodium. Even if you never salt your food, 90% of all processed foods contain sodium. Watch for the words "sodium", "soda", or "Na" in the ingredients list and eat these foods moderately.
- Avoid or eat less processed foods that are high in sodium. Some of these are canned soups and vegetables, most cheeses, tomato juice, ketchup, pickles, olives, canned tuna and crab, and frozen already-prepared dinners.
- Eat less fast food, most of which is loaded with salt.
- IF YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE IS HIGH DUE TO YOUR SODIUM INTAKE...ask your doctor about salt substitutes containing little or no sodium. However, be cautious, as these products are not for all individuals and should only be advised by a doctor.

FDA Approved Sodium Labeling Definitions

Sodium Free means less than 5mg sodium/serving

Very Low Sodium means no more than 35mg/serving

Low Sodium means no more than 140mg/serving

Reduced Sodium means sodium is reduced at least 75%

