

# February: Get Heart Smart about Sodium

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Did you know that February is American Heart Month, and not because of Valentine's Day? Since 1963 Congress has required the president to proclaim February "American Heart Month" to



raise public awareness about heart disease. Having too much sodium in your diet may increase your blood

pressure and raise your risk for not only heart disease, but also stroke and kidney disease. Heart disease and stroke are the nation's first and third leading causes of death. Recently, sodium has been in the news a lot and not for good reasons. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Americans on average get over 3400 milligrams (mg) of sodium a day, with the majority coming from packaged, processed, store bought and restaurant/fast food. Check out the following tips to get heart smart about sodium.

## Tips to Be Heart Smart about Sodium:

**What are the recommendations?** Check out the information on sodium according to the newly released (as of January 31, 2011) *2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*:

- **Adequate Intake (AI) levels**
  - 1 to 3 years: 1,000 mg/day
  - 4 to 8 years: 1,200 mg/day
  - 9 to 50 years: 1,500 mg/day
  - 51 to 70 years: 1,300 mg/day
  - 71 years and older: 1,200 mg/day
- **General Recommendations**
  - Reduce daily sodium intake to less than 2,300 mg/day (about 1 teaspoon of salt).
- **Specific Recommendations:**
  - Reduce intake to 1,500 mg/day (about one-half of a teaspoon) among those 51 years and older and those of any age who are African American or have hypertension, diabetes, or chronic kidney disease.



## Sea Salt vs. Table Salt:

- 90% of sodium we consume is in the form of salt. Sea salt is typically marketed as being a healthier alternative compared to table salt. Although they differ in taste, texture and processing, they have the same basic nutritional value.
- **Taste, texture, and processing.**
  - *Sea salt:* Produced through evaporation of seawater, usually with little processing. Trace elements and minerals left behind add flavor and color, which also comes in a variety of coarseness. Here is some more on coarse sea salt from Morton® Salt and how its texture is different and best uses: [http://www.mortonsalt.com/faqs/food\\_salt\\_faq.html#q9](http://www.mortonsalt.com/faqs/food_salt_faq.html#q9)
  - *Table salt:* Mined from underground salt deposits, more heavily processed to eliminate trace minerals, usually has an additive to prevent clumping, and most has added iodine (nutrient that naturally occurs in tiny amounts in sea salt).



**Bottom Line:** By weight, they both have about the same amount of sodium chloride. In other words, sea salt is still salt. No matter which one you prefer because of taste, texture, or processing, you should still reduce your intake to 1,500 to 2,300 mg of sodium a day if you're a healthy adult.

## Salt Substitutes – Are they right for you?

- **Potassium:** Many contain potassium chloride in place of sodium chloride. If you have kidney problems or are on medication for your heart, kidneys or liver, check with your doctor before using salt substitutes in place of sodium.
- **Labels.** Some are labeled "lite" or "low sodium" salt and still have sodium in them, just less than what is in table salt. These usually have a mix of sodium and potassium chloride. If a product is labeled "sodium free" then the main ingredient is potassium chloride with no sodium.

**Know how. Know now.**

## Lower the Sodium Threshold

- The preference for salty foods is something you learn, which means that over time you can reduce your cravings for salty foods or adding salt to your foods at meal times.
- When you lower your preference for salt, you can open yourself up to appreciating a wider range of flavors and food combinations.
- Start by adding fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains and legumes (dried beans, lentils, split peas) into your diet more often.
- Gradually experiment by adding salt-free herbs and spices into your favorite recipes.

## Try Going “Salt Free”

- Instead of mimicking the taste of sodium with salt substitutes, start experimenting with flavorful herbs and spices to add zest to food.
- Suggestions from UNL Extension Educator Alice Henneman:
  - Savory flavors, and flavors with "bite," such as black pepper, garlic powder, curry powder, cumin, dill seeds, basil, ginger, coriander and onion, are the most effective in replacing the taste of salt.
  - Use minced or powdered garlic and onion rather than their salt form. If you substitute minced or powdered garlic and onion for the salt version, you only need about half as much.
  - Omit the salt when cooking pasta and flavor with basil, oregano, parsley or pepper.
  - Check labels to see if "salt" or "sodium" is listed among ingredients.



## Food Labels are Your Friend!

- Most sodium in our food supply comes from packaged foods. Similar packaged foods can vary widely in sodium content.
- Use the Nutrition Facts Label to help you choose foods with a lower % Daily Value (DV) for sodium. Foods with less than 140

mg sodium per serving can be labeled as low sodium foods.

- Claims such as “low in sodium” or “very low in sodium” on the front of the food label can help you identify foods that contain less salt.

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 cup (228g)	
Servings Per Container 2	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 250	Calories from Fat 110
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 12g	18%
Saturated Fat 3g	15%
Trans Fat 1.5g	
Cholesterol 30mg	10%
Sodium 470mg	20%
Total Carbohydrate 31g	10%
Dietary Fiber 0g	0%
Sugars 5g	
Protein 5g	
Vitamin A	4%
Vitamin C	2%
Calcium	20%
Iron	4%
*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your Daily Values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:	
	Calories: 2,000 2,500
Total Fat	Less than 65g 80g
Sat Fat	Less than 20g 25g
Cholesterol	Less than 300mg 300mg
Sodium	Less than 2,400mg 2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate	300g 375g
Dietary Fiber	25g 30g

- Check out the example of a Nutrition Facts Label and see how fast sodium can add up!
  - **First** – look at the sodium listed on the label (In red box).
  - **Second** – Look at the serving size information at the top (In blue box).
  - **Third** – Calculate what you actually ate.
- One serving:* If you ate 1 serving (serving size is 1 cup), you would get 470 mg of sodium.
- The whole container:* If you ate the whole container (serving/per

container = 2 x 1 cup), that would be 2 cups. You then have to take 470 mg times 2 (number of servings per the container) to calculate how much sodium you are getting, which in this case is 940 mg.

<http://bit.ly/t8516>

## Check out these additional resources on sodium:

- **Handouts.** Check out UNL Extension Educator Alice Henneman’s handouts on how to get creative with spices and herbs!  
<http://bit.ly/eShBRF>  
<http://bit.ly/eb3qKe>
- **Salt Savvy Quiz.** Salt is in the news a lot lately. Most reports say Americans are consuming too much of it. How much do you REALLY know about salt? Test your “salt savvy” with the following quiz!  
<http://food.unl.edu/web/fnh/salt-savvy>
- **UNL NebGuide.** Although some sodium is good for the body, Americans typically consume about twice the amount considered healthy. Learn how to reduce sodium intake through food choices.  
<http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/sendIt/g1974.pdf>