



Shaking Your Salt Habit

Your body needs sodium to work properly, but most people consume too much, often without realizing it. Too much sodium in your system causes your body to retain water, which puts an extra burden on your heart and blood vessels. Reducing the amount of sodium in your diet may help you lower or avoid high blood pressure. This is important, because people with high blood pressure are more likely to develop heart disease or have a stroke. Diseases of the heart are the #1 cause of death in the United States and stroke is #3.

The average American eats about 2,900 to 4,300 milligrams of sodium each day. The American Heart Association recommends that if you are healthy, you should aim to eat less than 2,300 milligrams of sodium each day. For the most benefit, your goal should be even lower. Some people – African Americans, middle-aged and older adults, and people with high blood pressure – need less than 1,500 milligrams each day.

Most foods in their natural state contain some sodium, but the largest amount in our diet comes from commercially-processed foods, or foods prepared away from home. That's why you need to be aware of both natural sodium and added sodium when you make food choices.

Reading Food Labels

When buying prepared and packaged foods, make it a habit to check the sodium content on the Nutrition Facts label. Compare the sodium content of similar products (for example, different brands of tomato sauce) and choose the products with the lowest sodium.

If there is not a Nutrition Facts label, the ingredient list can provide some clues as to whether there is added sodium in the food. Look for the word "sodium" – it means that sodium compounds are present. Examples include disodium phosphate, sodium benzoate, sodium hydroxide, sodium nitrate, sodium propionate, and sodium sulfite. Also, watch for high-sodium ingredients such as monosodium glutamate, baking soda, and baking powder.

Next week, we will feature heart-healthy cooking techniques for spicing up dishes without adding extra salt.



Source: American Heart Association

**To learn more about cardiovascular health and wellness, visit
<http://www.americanheart.org>.**