

# HEALTHFUL TIPS

## Sodium Sense

Wise selections for reducing sodium in your diet



**S**odium in appropriate amounts is a good thing. It is an essential nutrient – meaning that the body cannot make it and it must come from dietary sources. Sodium is necessary for maintaining body fluid levels and to help with nerve signaling. A sodium deficiency is rare but can occur with excessive vomiting and diarrhea, in athletes who drink excess amounts of water, or in people who fast. Too much sodium intake is usually the case. In fact, 90% of us get more than a healthy amount of sodium in our diets. High dietary sodium can lead to high blood pressure, increasing the risk of heart attack and stroke. Although the current recommended daily allowance for sodium is 2300mg, less may be better. The American Heart Association recommends that many of us (about 60%) should consume less than 1500mg of sodium per day.

Nature provides an adequate amount of sodium in foods—so there is no reason to add sodium except of course taste and perhaps preserving food. Most of the excessive sodium we consume comes from a few types of foods—avoid these or choose lower-sodium options and you will be well on your way to a healthier diet.

### SALT, BAKING SODA, AND BAKING POWDER

Salt is the number-one source of excess sodium – just one teaspoon has 2325 mg of sodium. Baked goods contribute to excess sodium intake mainly through baking soda (1231 mg sodium per teaspoon) and baking powder (477 mg sodium per teaspoon).

### BROTHS, SOUPS, & GRAVIES

Salt is widely used as an agent to dry and preserve foods and soup broths are no exception. A typical 5 gram bouillon cube contains 1200mg of sodium or 50% of the RDA.

### SAUCES & SALAD DRESSINGS

One teaspoon of soy sauce contains 335mg sodium. Many other sauces and salad dressings are surprisingly high in sodium. A quick check of the nutrition facts label of a few popular salad dressings found a range of 230–550 mg sodium per serving (2 tbsp.), pasta sauce 610 mg per ½ cup serving, and marinade 430 mg sodium for 2 tbsp.

### PROCESSED & CURED MEATS

It's not so surprising to find a high amount of sodium in bacon (194 mg

per slice), salami (641 mg per oz), jerky (629 mg per oz) or a hot dog (about 600 mg depending on size). But how about that lean deli turkey? You might be surprised to find that there are 336 mg of sodium per ounce!

### CHEESE & DAIRY PRODUCTS

From bleu cheese to Cheez Whiz, cheese has about 170 mg per ounce. Even a calcium and protein-rich glass of skim milk has 103 mg of sodium per cup.

### PACKAGED FOODS

From frozen entrees to potato chips to boxed mixes to soups—processed and packaged foods often contain unexpected amounts of sodium. Sodium content can vary significantly from brand to brand—so check the labels.

***So what's a health-conscious person to do?*** Be aware of foods that tend to be higher in sodium. Check nutrition facts labels and compare brands. Eat foods in their closest-to-nature (in their least-processed) form. Cook from scratch more often. Eat fresh fruits and vegetables (they weren't on the list above). Take the salt shaker off the table.