

Healthy Measures: Shaking the Salt Habit

Canadians consume far more sodium (a component of salt) than recommended, an average of 3100 mg/day. The current recommendation advises people to consume no more than 2300 mg/day (about 1 teaspoon of salt).

The primary concern with a high sodium intake is its effect on blood pressure. High blood pressure (hypertension) is a major risk factor for heart attack, stroke and kidney disease. But even if you don't have high blood pressure, you can benefit from reducing your sodium intake.

It's not the salt shaker at the table that is to blame - this contributes only about 11 per cent of total consumption. The real culprit is processed foods which accounts for about 77 per cent of our sodium intake. This comes from fast foods, prepared meals, processed meats such as hot dogs and lunchmeats, canned soups, bottled dressings, packaged sauces, condiments such as ketchup and pickles, and salty snacks like potato chips. Some sodium occurs naturally in food, but this only accounts for 12 per cent.

How to lower your sodium intake:

- Eat more fresh foods. Vegetables and fruit are great choices since they are naturally low in sodium.
- Prepare more foods from scratch. Make your own soups, sauces and marinades so you can control how much salt goes in.
- Use herbs, spices and other flavourings to enhance the taste of the food
- Opt for low-sodium products
- Avoid menu items that indicate high sodium content such as "pickled", "smoked", "au jus" and "in broth"
- Use the % Daily Value (% DV) on the Nutrition Facts Table to check the amount of sodium in foods. Look for a product with less than 15% DV for sodium
- Read the ingredient list. There are many terms for sodium such as baking soda, baking powder, monosodium glutamate and any compounds that have "sodium" in the name

The taste for salt is acquired, so it can be reversed. You can teach your taste buds to enjoy foods with less salt by decreasing your use of salt gradually. Your taste buds will adjust and the desire declines. We acquire the taste and desire for salt at a young age so it is important to get children into the habit of liking lightly salted and unsalted foods.

For more information:

[Eat Right Ontario: Cut out the Salt](#)

[Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario](#)

If you have questions on nutrition and healthy eating, contact *EatRight Ontario* at 1-877-510-5102 to speak to a Registered Dietitian.

Healthy Measures: Eat Well, Be Active and Be Yourself!