

CARDIOVASCULAR MEDICINE TAKEOUT

Too Much Salt?

Most of us are eating too much salt. The average American consumes 5000 milligrams of salt per day—or roughly four pounds a year. By contrast, the Food and Drug Administration has suggested a daily intake of 1000 to 3000 milligrams of salt.

In ancient times, salt was the only possible means of preserving foods, especially meat and fish. It was also, before the onset of international trade, the *only* seasoning available—laying the historical groundwork for its widespread popularity today. Although it is easy to understand how salt has come into such universal use, it must also be emphasized that the need for this common condiment—as a preservative—no longer exists.

There are a number of good reasons for cutting down on the amount of salt you usually eat: Excessive salt can trigger high blood pressure in persons susceptible to this condition; salt has been linked to such varied conditions as heart disease, stomach cancer, and migraine headaches; and salt in some foods has been associated with toxicity—poisoning—in otherwise healthy individuals.

How to reduce your salt intake

There is no easy way to reduce—and *no* way to eliminate—all the salt in your diet. Salt occurs naturally

in many foods, and it is especially high in processed foods. The easiest way to cut your salt intake is to reduce your use of table salt. Try other spices instead. If you crave a salty taste, use small amounts of soy sauce.

One additional benefit of cutting down on salt is that fried foods—which invariably taste better with salt—will be less appealing to you unsalted. Since fried foods contain large amounts of cholesterol—a substance that can damage your arteries and lead to serious heart

disease—eating less of these foods will help you to reduce your risk of developing coronary artery disease.

There are certain people who may, out of habit, find it impossible to cut down on their salt intake. If you feel you are in this category, you should seek professional advice. Your doctor may recommend a salt substitute, such as potassium chloride. Salt substitutes should be used *only* on your doctor's orders.

Most of the food you buy in the supermarket has some salt in it—either naturally occurring or added during processing. This is even true of seemingly “unsalty” foods like bread and cheese. The chart above tells you how much salt—expressed as milligrams of sodium—is found in some of the foods you eat. By paying attention to your diet, and by restricting your use of table salt, you should be able to reduce your salt intake. □

SODIUM CONTENT OF EVERYDAY FOODS

Sodium Level	Type of Food	Serving	Sodium Content (mg)
High	Peanut butter	2 tbsp.	700
	Tomato juice	1 cup	485
	Bacon	2 slices	325
	Corn flakes	$\frac{3}{4}$ cup	190
Moderate	Yogurt (plain)	1 cup	125
	Turkey (white)	3 oz.	70
	Celery	1 stalk	65
	Parmesan cheese	1 tbsp.	65
Low	Chicken (white)	3 oz.	55
	Tuna (canned)	3 oz.	35
	Broccoli	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	7
	Spaghetti	$\frac{1}{4}$ cup	1