Did you know?

• Sodium is a mineral found in many foods. It is measured in milligrams (mg).
• Our bodies need only a very small amount (about 180-500 mg per day) to work properly.
• Most Americans eat more than 3,000 mg per day. More than 75% comes from processed foods and restaurant foods. About 12% comes from foods naturally and about 10% comes from salt added at the table or during cooking.

Eating too much sodium is linked to high blood pressure, which increases your risk of heart attack, stroke, and type 2 diabetes.

The 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends that adults eat less than 2,300 mg of sodium per day.

Lowering your blood pressure is especially important if you have pre-hypertension or hypertension. Further reducing the amount of sodium you eat to 1,500 mg per day can help you lower your blood pressure even more.

Many factors can influence the specific limit that is best for you. Talk with your doctor about your daily sodium limit.

It’s best to cut back on sodium slowly. A “salty taste” is pleasant to most of us. Salt can help bring out other flavors in foods too. But if you cut back slowly over time, you won’t miss the salt. Foods that used to taste bland will begin to taste flavorful without added salt. It may take a month or two for that to happen.
Three Ways to Eat Less Sodium

Ways to eat less sodium:

1. Choose fresh foods more often than processed foods.
   - Most processed foods are high in sodium from additives. Examples:
     - Canned foods, such as soup, broth, fish, vegetables, and beans
     - Condiments, such as salad dressings, soy sauce, and ketchup
     - Processed cheese and meats, such as hot dogs, ham, bacon, and lunch meats
     - Foods cured in brine, such as olives, pickles, and sauerkraut
     - Dried foods (such as soups and mixes for pancakes) potatoes, rice, and stuffing
     - Frozen dinners and frozen vegetables with sauce
     - Most breakfast cereals and many breads
     - Snack foods, such as chips and salted nuts
     - Prepared foods, such as lasagna, pizza, pot pies, stews, and desserts
   - Compare food labels when you shop. Choose items with low or no sodium.
     - Find the Nutrition Facts label on the package.
     - Look at the serving size. Is this how much you ate?
     - Look at the milligrams of sodium per serving.
     - What if you eat more than the serving size? You will be eating more sodium than is on the label.
     - What if you eat less than the serving size? You will be eating less sodium than is on the label.
     - Be careful! Foods labeled “reduced sodium” must be at least 25% lower in sodium than the “regular” version. But they may still be high in sodium.
     - “Low sodium” foods contain less than 140 mg per serving.

2. Eat out less often. You have more control over your choices when you eat at home instead. When you do eat out:
   - Avoid fast food when you can.
   - Eating fast food? Ask to see the Nutrition Facts for sodium before you order.
   - Ask for fresh foods that are grilled, baked, broiled, or poached with no salt added.
   - Ask for sauces, gravy, and dressings on the side. Limit the amount you use.
   - Avoid soup; tomato sauces; and marinated, pickled, smoked, cured, or breaded foods.
3. Flavor your food with no-salt seasonings, herbs, and spices.

- Limit or avoid these common high-sodium flavorings:
  - Ketchup, mustard, barbecue sauce, tartar sauce, salsa, steak sauce, Worcestershire sauce, and prepared horseradish
  - Cooking wine, soy sauce, seasoning salts, salt, sea salt, kosher salt, garlic salt, onion salt, and celery salt
  - Gravy, salt pork, and bacon fat
  - Meat tenderizers and monosodium glutamate (MSG)
  - Most salad dressings
  - Many other condiments

- Flavor your food with these instead:
  - Freshly ground black pepper
  - Lemon juice, grated lemon rinds, fresh hot peppers, fresh ginger, onions, and garlic (not garlic salt)
  - Vanilla or almond extract (such as in cooked oatmeal or rice)
  - Vinegar, which comes in different flavors (avoid those made with salt)
  - Fresh herbs and spices, such as basil, cinnamon, chili powder, curry powder, garlic powder, ginger, marjoram, mint, onion powder, oregano, parsley, black pepper, red pepper, rosemary, sage, and thyme
  - For four servings, start with ¼ teaspoon dried or ¾ teaspoon fresh of one or two herbs or spices (check cookbooks for ideas)

- Begin to use an herb-based, no-salt seasoning.
  - Try a few brands until you find one you like (two examples are Mrs. Dash® and McCormick’s Perfect Pinch®)

- Keep the seasonings on the table and by the stove. Over time, use them more than the salt-shaker. Then put your saltshaker away.

- Most salt substitutes contain potassium chloride. Check with your doctor before using them. Do not use them if you have kidney disease. Also, if you use them, you may still prefer a salty taste. Eat less salt instead to adjust to a less salty flavor.

- Don’t use lite or low-sodium salts. They still contain sodium, just less than table salt. They also contain potassium chloride.

Keep in mind that it takes time to build new eating habits. Be patient and keep taking small steps in a healthy direction. You can do it!

**Note:** Most people find one of the three areas above to be the most difficult to change. Ask your UPMC Health Plan health coach for help in the areas you find most challenging.
## Take Action

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<th>Do your best to reach the SMART* goal you set with your health coach. Write it here. Check the box when you have completed it.</th>
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<th>My SMART goal for this week</th>
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<td>When you are ready, write down three high-sodium food choices you make often and three lower-sodium options.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>High-Sodium Choice</strong></td>
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<td>When you are ready, choose one or two ideas from this tip sheet that you would like to put into action. Set a weekly SMART goal for each one. Write your goals here. Check the boxes when you have completed them.</td>
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*A healthy life is on the line for you!*
SMART goals are Specific, Measurable, Appropriate, Realistic, and Timely. For example, “On Saturday, I will order a sub with oven-roasted chicken and plain oil and vinegar instead of my usual buffalo chicken with American cheese and ranch dressing.”

SMART goals help you succeed! If you have any trouble setting your weekly SMART goals, ask your health coach for help.

The information in this tip sheet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended or implied to be a substitute for professional medical advice. Before making changes, always talk to your doctor about what is right for you.

Sources: