

The Wellness Report— Fall 2015 Report



Shake it Like a Salt Shaker

Sodium is crucial to your health, as your body needs it to carry out normal bodily functions. Sodium is also needed to assist with nerve functions. It is responsible for balancing the amount of fluids in your body and ensuring your muscles contract the way they should. We need to ingest salt on a daily basis, but it is important to know how much to consume, as too much could be hazardous to your health.

Sodium is added to foods to enhance taste and act as a preservative. It's an ingredient in all types of salt, from table salt and kosher salt to sea salt and pickling salt.

Healthy adults need around 1,500 milligrams of sodium per day, or the equivalent of just over half a teaspoon of table salt. Currently, the average Canadian consumes about 3,400 milligrams per day ' more than double the actual requirement!



Too much sodium in our diet can be a major risk factor for high blood pressure (hypertension), which, in turn, increases our risk of heart disease and stroke. It has also been linked to an increased risk of kidney disease, osteoporosis and stomach cancer.

About 20 percent of Canadians have hypertension; of those, about 30 percent of the time it is due to elevated levels of sodium in their diet. As the number one preventable risk factor for stroke, the good news is,

If you lower your sodium intake, you can also lower your blood pressure and your risk.

Some of the signs of high sodium are:

1. Extreme Thirst - A common sign of excess sodium intake is extreme thirst--and you've probably noticed that you get thirsty after eating salty foods. If you wake up thirsty in the middle of the night or in the morning, it could mean you ingested too much salt the previous day.

2. Bloating Feeling - After consuming too much salt, you're likely to feel bloated and uncomfortable. Sodium is a mineral that naturally retains water, and a side effect of this water retention is a bloated sensation.

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Some of the signs of high sodium are (continued):

3. High Blood Pressure - One of the main (and most threatening) signs of excess sodium in the body is high blood pressure, and this could put you at risk for heart disease and stroke. When your kidneys can't get rid of excess sodium, it is put into your blood stream. When this happens, your blood volume increases since sodium magnetizes and retains water. This not only raises your blood pressure, but it forces your heart to work even harder to pump blood through your vessels, straining your arteries and other organs.

4. Osteoporosis - Another dangerous effect of ingesting too much sodium is the risk of developing osteoporosis. If your bones are already becoming weak and brittle, it could be an indication that you're consuming too much salt. Sodium decreases your bone density, which causes them to lose strength. It also interferes with your body's ability to absorb calcium--the nutrient which is crucial for building and maintaining bone health.

While it seems easy enough to back away from the salt shaker, the truth is that most of the sodium in our diet comes from processed and packaged foods. Sodium is hidden in the form of food additives and MSG, both in the grocery store and restaurants. Getting rid of these from our diet is key. Check sodium levels on labels before buying, and **look for foods with low sodium per serving**. Avoid processed and cured meats, and skip sauces and gravies or, at the very least, have them served on the side for better portion control.

Keep in mind that there are a number of foods with significant sodium levels, whether added or naturally occurring, for you to be aware of. These include bacon, pickles, canned vegetables, teriyaki sauce, soy sauce, cottage cheese, olives, sun-dried tomatoes and seafood.



Going homemade is the best way to control just how much salt goes into your food. Replace store-bought baked goods with those made from scratch. Brush steaks, chops, ribs, chicken and fish with a little oil flavoured with minced garlic, fresh herbs and spices before cooking. Swap frozen fries for potatoes that are chopped, tossed with oil and herbs, and baked until crisp and golden. Switch out instant flavoured oatmeal for rolled oats topped with your choice of added fruit. Rinse and drain canned beans and lentils or, even replace canned beans with dried ones. At the dinner table, train yourself to taste your food before adding any salt. Lacking in flavour? Experiment with your favourite spices and herbs, or add lemon or vinegar to add vibrancy to a wide array of foods. There are a wealth of **creative and flavour-packed alternatives**, like dill on fish and vegetables, paprika in soups and salads and mustard on beef or vegetables.

References:

- www.fitday.com "4 Signs You're Getting Too Much Sodium"
- www.msn.com "How Much Sodium is Too Much?"
- Health Canada "Sodium in Canada"
- www.snacksense.com

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