

Low Sodium, No Sacrifice

Tasty strategies and recipes

Are you aware that salt is an edible rock? And that it's the oldest food additive, first used as a preservative?

You probably already know the problem with salt, also known as sodium chloride. We all require a small amount of salt. But most Americans get too much of it, which puts our health in danger.

Health Pressures

If you're one of the third of Americans with hyper-tension—high blood pressure—a high-sodium diet may be to blame. The reason: Sodium increases blood pressure in some people's bodies by causing excess fluid retention. The heart endures an added strain as a result.

In addition to cardiovascular diseases and hypertension, high sodium intake also can increase risk of stroke, stomach cancer, osteoporosis, and kidney disease. Consuming high-sodium foods can cause calcium loss, thus weakening your bones, says the National Osteoporosis Foundation.

How much sodium is too much? Consume 1,500 milligrams (mg) or less daily, recommends the American Heart Association. That's a little over a half teaspoon of salt.

Most Americans eat about 3,400 mg of sodium per day—more than double the recommended amount. In a report released last February, the American Heart Association found that even a gradual reduction of sodium to about 2,200 mg daily over 10 years would save as many as half a million lives.

SODIUM SOURCES

You may be surprised that these foods often contain sodium: breads, bagels, nonfat cottage cheese, ready-to-eat cereals, and pumpkin pie. Table salt is about 40 percent sodium.

SELECTED SOURCES "10 Ways to Control High Blood Pressure Without Medication," www.mayoclinic.com ■ "Food and Your Bones," National Osteoporosis Foundation, www.nof.org ■ "Lower Salt and Sodium: A Key to Good Health," Harvard School of Public Health, www.hsph.harvard.edu ■ "Reducing Sodium in Your Diet"; "Shaking the Salt Habit"; "Sodium (Salt or Sodium Chloride)," American Heart Association, www.heart.org/ ■ "Sodium, Na (mg) Content of Selected Foods . . .," USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference, Release 24, <http://ndb.nal.usda.gov>