



Sodium

Updated

March 2008

IT'S YOUR HEALTH

This article was produced in collaboration with the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Sodium

The Issue

Sodium is a nutrient found in table salt and many other foods. While the body needs some sodium to function, too much may lead to high blood pressure, a major risk factor for stroke, heart disease and kidney disease. Most Canadians consume more sodium than may be good for their health.

Background

Sodium is needed in the body to regulate fluids and blood pressure, and to keep muscles and nerves running smoothly. The amount of sodium considered adequate to promote good health in adults is 1,500 mg per day. The United States Institute of Medicine (IOM) establishes nutrient reference values which are used by Health Canada to set policies and standards. Working closely with the IOM to establish the Tolerable Upper Intake Level (UL), Health Canada recommends that a maximum of 2,300 mg per day for adults is likely to pose no risk of adverse health effects.

Most Canadians get much more sodium than they need to maintain good health.

Recent data from the 2004 Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS 2.2) Nutrition, indicates that Canadian adults consumed an average of 3,092 mg of sodium daily, more than double the level recommended and considerably higher than the UL. According to the CCHS 2.2 survey, it is estimated that among people over the age of 19, more than 90 percent of men and about 66 percent of women had intakes above the UL for sodium. Similar high intakes are seen in young children and adolescents: 76 percent of children aged 1 to 3 and more than 90 percent of children aged 4 to 8 exceed the UL for sodium in their age group. 97 percent of adolescent boys and more than 80 percent of adolescent girls also exceed the UL for sodium for their age group.

Sources of Sodium

Sodium (Na) is one of the chemical elements found in table salt, also known as sodium chloride. Most of the sodium consumed by Canadians comes from prepackaged, ready-to-eat foods, rather than from salt added at the table or in home cooking. Restaurant foods, especially those from fast food outlets, generally contain high amounts of sodium. As well, since sodium is often

used by the food industry to enhance flavour or as a preservative, many common foods contain sodium. Some of the foods that can be high in sodium include: sandwiches and burgers; soups; pizza; frozen and ready-to-eat meals; cheese; gravies and sauces; processed luncheon meats; and snack foods, such as crackers, nachos, potato chips and pretzels.

Salt and sodium

- 1 teaspoonful contains about 6 grams of salt
- 6 grams of salt contains about 2400 mg of sodium

Nutrition Facts	
Per 125 mL (97 g)	
Amount	% Daily Value
Calories 80	
Fat 0.5 g	1 %
Saturated 0 g + Trans 0 g	0 %
Cholesterol 0 mg	
Sodium 800 mg	38 %
Carbohydrate 18 g	6 %
Fibre 2 g	8 %
Sugars 2 g	
Protein 3 g	
Vitamin A 2 %	Vitamin C 10 %
Calcium 0 %	Iron 2 %

Health Risks of Excess Sodium

A diet high in sodium is associated with an increased risk of high blood pressure. High blood pressure is a major risk factor for stroke, heart disease and kidney disease. In addition to excess sodium, other risk factors for high blood pressure include:

- being overweight or obese
- lack of physical activity
- excessive alcohol intake
- age

- family history of hypertension or high blood pressure
- being of African descent.

Minimizing Your Risk

- Use Canada’s Food Guide and the Nutrition Facts table to help lower your sodium intake. Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide recommends choosing foods from each food group that are lower in sodium and preparing foods with little or no added salt.
- Read nutrition labels to make informed food choices. Almost all prepackaged foods have a Nutrition Facts table, making it easier to see how much sodium is in any given food. The label will give you the amount of sodium in the specific amount of food listed.
- Check the percentage of the Daily Value (%DV) for sodium. The %DV tells you at a glance if there is a lot or a little of a nutrient in that specific amount of food. Use the %DV to compare food products.
- Since most people get more sodium than is healthy from prepackaged foods and meals purchased outside of the home, reduce your sodium consumption by choosing these foods less often.
- Choose more fresh, unprocessed foods to eat or prepare at home in place of prepackaged, convenience foods and choose plenty of fruits and vegetables. Fruits and vegetables are also higher in potassium which is a factor in reducing the risk of high blood pressure.
- Look for foods with claims such as “salt-free” (less than 5 mg of sodium per serving), “low in

sodium” (140 mg of sodium or less per serving), or “reduced in sodium” (at least 25 percent less than the regular product).

- Remember that there is no need to add salt to children’s food. Check the Nutrition Facts table to help choose foods aimed at children that are lower in sodium.
- When dining out, order dressings and sauces on the side and use sparingly. Before you eat at a fast food restaurant, ask for nutrition information to see how much sodium is in the food on their menu. Many chains now make nutrition information available online or posted in their outlets.

The Government of Canada's Role

As part of its ongoing commitment to provide Canadians with the information they need to make healthy lifestyle choices, the Government of Canada introduced mandatory nutrition labelling for pre-packaged foods. The regulations require that calories and the content of 13 core nutrients, including sodium, be listed on the labels of most pre-packaged foods.

In October 2007, federal Health Minister Tony Clement announced that the Government of Canada will establish an expert Sodium Working Group to explore options for reducing sodium intake among Canadians. The Working Group includes representatives from food manufacturing and food service industry groups, health-focussed non-governmental organizations, the scientific community, health professional organizations and consumer advocacy groups. Information on the progress of this



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Working Group will be made available on Health Canada's Food and Nutrition Web section.

Need More Info?

For more information visit some of the following sites:

Nutrition Labelling:
www.healthcanada.gc.ca/nutritionlabelling

Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide:
www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide

Nutrient Value of Some Common Foods:
www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/alt_formats/hpfb-dgpsa/pdf/nutrition/nvscf-vnqau_e.pdf

Health Canada's Food and Nutrition section:
www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/index_e.html

Canadian Food Inspection Agency:
www.inspection.gc.ca/

For additional articles on health and safety issues go to the It's Your Health Web section at:

www.healthcanada.gc.ca/iyh

You can also call toll free at

1-866-225-0709

or TTY at 1-800-267-1245*