



**DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY & CORRECTIONAL SERVICES**  
**EDUCATION HANDOUT – SODIUM**  
**MAKING SENSE OF SODIUM**

Sodium, a mineral that occurs naturally in foods, is essential to health. The primary source of sodium in the American diet is salt, also known as sodium chloride. Sodium is found in a number of other forms such as baking soda and baking powder. Sodium is involved in nearly all body functions including:

- Helping maintain a proper water balance
- Regulating blood pressure
- Transmitting nerve impulses
- Maintaining normal muscle activity

Americans typically consume adequate salt; most healthy individuals should choose an eating pattern that is moderate in salt. For some people, too much sodium in the diet may contribute to high blood pressure, or hypertension. A high sodium diet alone, however, does not cause high blood pressure. Many factors can affect blood pressure, these include family history, weight, age, physical activity, alcohol intake, and smoking.



The best approach to moderating your sodium is balancing your food choice over time. When you eat a food high in sodium, later choose from foods that are lower in sodium. It is also important to moderate your portion sizes. According to the nutrition fact panel found on most packaged foods, the recommended average intake of sodium for health Americans is 2300 milligrams, although lower sodium levels are more desirable. Keep in mind that one teaspoon of salt contains about 2000 milligrams of sodium.

Suggestions for moderating sodium intake:

- Omit adding salt to your food when cooking or during mealtime
- Avoid all salted foods such as bouillon, canned soups and stews, bread and rolls with salted toppings, salted crackers, salted nuts, popcorn, potato chips, pretzels, and other salted snacks
- Reduced sodium products may be used, check labels
- Avoid all salt cured, smoked and processed smoked meats, such as ham, bacon, bologna, cold cuts, chipped and corned beef, frankfurters, koshered or kosher style meats, canned meat and poultry
- Avoid salted and smoked fish, such as cod, herring, sardines, canned salted salmon, and tuna
- Avoid sauerkraut, olives, pickles, relish, and other vegetables prepared in brine, tomato and vegetable juice cocktail juices canned with salt



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- Avoid seasonings such as salt, garlic salt, Worcestershire sauce, soy sauce, and others containing salt
- Use no salt substitutes unless approved by your physician
- Limit processed cheeses to 2 servings per week unless it is low sodium, check labels
- In addition to items listed above, remember to review labels when buying commissary items and avoid products such as beef jerky, Spam, hot sauces, dry soups, cheese spreads, and party mixes

Please contact your physician if you have questions.

**References**

Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. (2014). *Diet Manual for Long-Term Care Residents*. (Rev. ed.) Office of Health Care Quality.

United States Department of Health and Human Services, (December 2020) US Department of Agriculture. (2020-2025). *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. Center Nutrition and Policy Promotion.