

Shake the Salt Habit

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Did you know the University of Maryland Dining Services removed salt shakers from dining tables at its three dining halls? Do you know why? UMD is supporting the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics' initiative to encourage consumers to follow sodium intake recommendations from the [Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010](#).

Most of us consume way too much sodium, exceeding the recommended intake for half of the US population by more than 200%. Where do we get all this sodium?

Prepackaged foods and prepared meals pack a double whammy: the food items typically contain high levels of sodium and the additives in these items usually contain high amounts of sodium as well.

Restaurant and fast food meals are often loaded with sodium.

We add even more at the table.

If you think you're too young to face health risks associated with excessive salt intake, think again! According to the American Heart Association, 97% of children and adolescents consume way too much sodium.

Although excess sodium can lead to cardiovascular disease, sodium is essential for good health. The deal is, we only need a small amount each day.

The recommended daily intake of sodium for about half of the US population is 1500 mg. How does that compare? Take a look!

1 teaspoon of table salt (NaCl)	2325 mg	155%
Ham sandwich	1420 mg	95%
3 Chicken Fritter Strips	721 mg	48%
1 Philadelphia Chicken Sub	725 mg	48%
3 oz shredded cheese	547 mg	36%
1 slice pepperoni pizza	455 mg	30%

Compared to 1500 mg intake

How can you reduce your intake? Here are some helpful tips:

Use alternatives: Garlic, red pepper flakes, onion, lemon juice, and salt-free seasonings are great alternatives.

Opt out: Select no-salt or reduced sodium foods. Buy no-salt nut mixes and low or reduced sodium prepared foods and canned soups. Buy fresh or frozen vegetables.

Be prepared: Prepare healthy snacks and meals in advance so you have sodium-smart options on hand.

Check the label: If you purchase prepackage foods or meals, select items that contain less than 600 mg of sodium per serving.

Taste your food: Train your taste buds to appreciate the flavor of your food. Often we load our food with so much salt that we taste the salt, not the food.

So, if you really need the salt shaker, grab one from the condiment bar. But, think twice before reaching for the shaker - do you really need that salt?

Source: American Heart Association (2013). http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/GettingHealthy/NutritionCenter/HealthyDietGoals/Sodium-Salt-or-Sodium-Chloride_UCM_303290_Article.jsp

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