



Health
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Votre santé et votre
sécurité... notre priorité.

Sodium

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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. Your body needs some sodium to function, but too much may lead to high blood pressure (a major risk factor

for stroke, heart disease and kidney disease). Most Canadians take in more than twice the amount of sodium they need in a day.

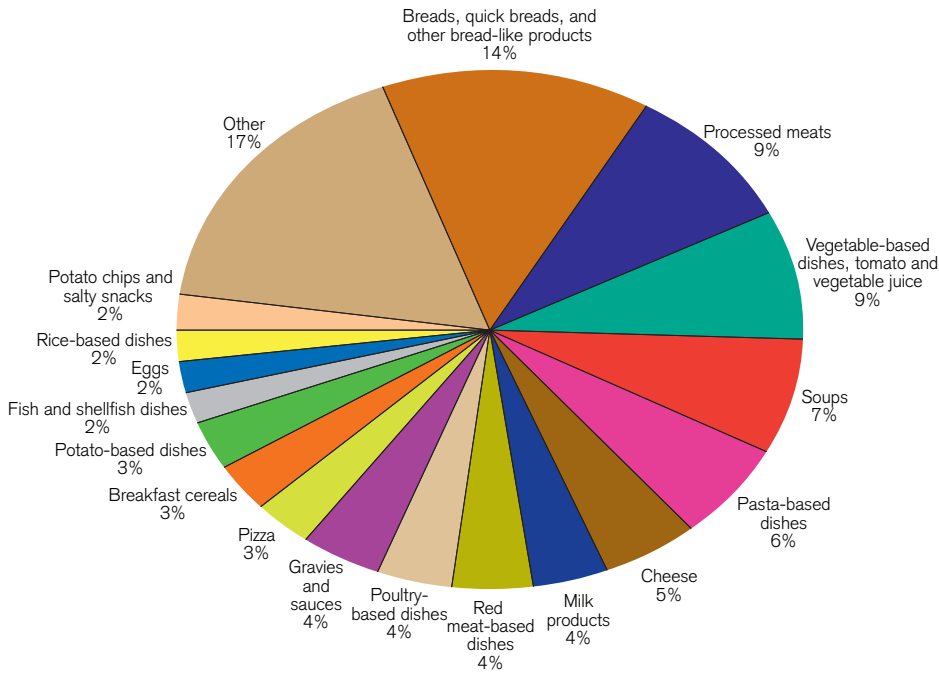
Some sodium is needed in your body to regulate fluids and blood pressure, and to keep muscles and nerves running smoothly. Healthy adults need only 1500 mg of sodium each day. Healthy children need only 1000–1500 mg of sodium a day. This is known as the [Adequate Intake \(AI\)](#).

People aged 14 and over should eat no more than 2300 mg of sodium each day. This is known as the [Tolerable Upper Intake Level \(UL\)](#). A sodium intake above 2300 mg a day is likely to present a health risk.

It is estimated that Canadians one year of age and older eat an average of about 3400 mg/day of sodium. This is more than twice the recommended AI of 1500 mg/day for individuals from 9 to 70 years, and 50% more than the UL for adults of 2300 mg/day. Actual sodium consumption is likely to be even higher because people tend to underestimate how much they eat on self-reported food intake surveys such as those on which this estimate was based.

Children need less sodium than their parents. However, due to the types of

Healthy...	should aim for the Adequate Intake (AI) of...	without going over the Upper Limit (UL) of...
Infants 0-6 months	120 mg/day	No data
Infants 7-12 months	370 mg/day	No data
Children 1-3 years	1000 mg/day	1500 mg/day
Children 4-8 years	1200 mg/day	1900 mg/day
Teens 9-13 years	1500 mg/day	2200 mg/day
Adults 14-50 years	1500 mg/day	2300 mg/day
Older adults 51-70 years	1300 mg/day	
Older adults over 70 years	1200 mg/day	



Use the **Sodium Detector** to find out how much sodium is in the foods you eat.

food we choose to eat at home and in restaurants, both children and adults often eat unhealthy levels of sodium.

SOURCES OF SODIUM

What are some of the common sources of sodium in our diets?

Processed foods (including restaurant and fast foods) account for 77% of the sodium we eat. Another 12% is found naturally in foods, 6% we add at the table, and 5% we add during cooking. So 88% of all the sodium in our diet is not present naturally: it is added during food manufacturing or preparation.

Approximately 30% of our sodium comes from mixed dishes (examples of these include: macaroni and cheese, lasagne, beef stew, scalloped potatoes, seasoned or flavoured rices); 14% from bread and bread-type products; 9% from processed meats like deli meats and seasoned meats; 7% from soups; 5% from cheeses; 4% from milk products; and 4% from gravies and sauces.

Health risks of eating too much sodium

In adults, a diet high in sodium can lead to an increased risk of high blood pressure. High blood pressure is a major risk factor for stroke, heart disease and kidney disease.



In children, high sodium intake can lead to increased risk of high blood pressure, the development of high blood pressure later in life, and the tendency for children to prefer foods with high salt content.

The good news is, if Canadians reduce their sodium intake, their blood pressure is likely to decrease.

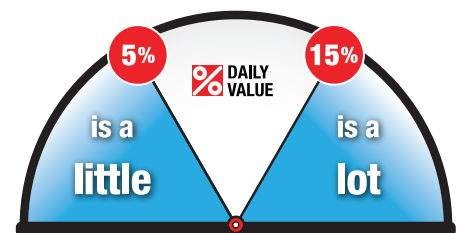
REDUCE YOUR RISK

At the grocery store

Read the information on food packages



- Buy unsalted and low sodium foods when possible. Look for words like “sodium free,” “low sodium,” “reduced sodium” or “no added salt” on the package.
- Compare food labels. Buy products with the lowest amount of sodium.
- Look for foods that have less than 360 mg of sodium in a serving.
- You can also use the **% Daily Value (% DV)** on the label to compare products and see if a food has a little or a lot of sodium.



Here is a good guide:

5% DV or less is a little

15% DV or more is a lot

- Look for products with a sodium content of less than 15% DV.
- Check food labels often because product ingredients may change.



IT'S YOUR HEALTH



Make wise choices from the four food groups in *Canada's Food Guide*

Vegetables and fruit

- Buy fresh or frozen vegetables when possible.
- Look for canned vegetables that are low in sodium or made with no added salt.
- Buy low sodium vegetable juice and tomato juice.

Grain products

- Choose bread, breakfast cereals and bakery products that are lowest in sodium.
- Enjoy a variety of grains like barley, quinoa and rice, which are naturally sodium free.

Milk and alternatives

- Choose milk, fortified soy beverages and yogurt. They are low in sodium.

Meat and alternatives

- Buy unseasoned meat, poultry, fish, seafood and tofu.
- Choose unsalted nuts.
- Buy low sodium canned beans, or try dried beans, peas and lentils.

At home

Make healthy meals and snacks

- Eat fewer packaged, ready-to-eat and take-out foods.
- Make your own soups, sauces and salad dressings. Find quick and easy recipes on the [Dietitians of Canada](#) website.



Eat more vegetables and fruit. Use fresh or frozen instead of canned when possible.

- Cook pasta, rice and other grains, or hot cereal without adding salt.
- Taste your food before adding salt.

Eating out

Make lower sodium menu choices

- Order smaller portions or share with someone.
- Ask for gravy, sauces and salad dressings on the side, and use only small amounts.
- Flavour your food with lemon or pepper instead of adding salt, sauces or gravy.
- Balance out your day. If you ate a high sodium lunch, make sure you eat a lower sodium supper.
- Ask for your meal to be cooked without salt or monosodium glutamate (MSG), a seasoning that is very high in sodium.

THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA'S ROLE

Sodium reduction can best be achieved if everyone plays a role, including individual Canadians, the food industry, governments and healthcare organizations. The [Government of Canada](#), in partnership with other stakeholders, supports Canadians in their sodium reduction efforts. Federal, provincial and territorial governments and stakeholders are working together to reduce sodium through public awareness and education activities to assist individuals to make informed food choices, guidance to the food industry on reducing sodium in processed foods, and research to learn more about sodium and health. The goal is for Canadians to lower their average daily sodium intake by just over 30% (to 2300 mg or less a day) by 2016.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- [Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide](#) at: www.health.gc.ca/foodguide
- Using the Nutrition Facts Table: "[% Daily Value](#)" fact sheet at: www.health.gc.ca/dailyvalue
- Interactive tools on [how to use the % Daily Value and the amount of food](#) at: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/label-etiquet/nutrition/cons/dv-vq/interact-eng.php

- [Nutrient Value of Some Common Foods](#) at: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/alt_formats/hpfb-dgpsa/pdf/nutrition/nvscf-vnqau_e.pdf
- The Dietitians of Canada, [Your Health](#) website at: www.dietitians.ca/Your-Health.aspx

FOR INDUSTRY AND HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

- A ready-to-use presentation for educators called [Understanding Nutrition Labelling to Make Informed Food Choices](#) at: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/label-etiquet/nutrition/educat/info-nutri-label-etiquet-eng.php
- The Canadian Food Inspection Agency's [Guide to Food Labelling and Advertising](#) at: www.inspection.gc.ca/english/fssa/labeti/guide/toce.shtml

RELATED RESOURCES

- For safety information about food, health and consumer products, visit the [Healthy Canadians](#) website at: www.healthycanadians.gc.ca
- For more articles on health and safety issues go to the [It's Your Health](#) web section at: www.health.gc.ca/iyh

You can also call toll free at 1-866-225-0709 or TTY at 1-800-267-1245*

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