

Sane talk about sodium and your blood pressure

Will you be one out of every five adult Americans with high blood pressure? Can you avoid it? Below is a U.S. Dietary Guideline, with comment from General Foods.

The first shock of high blood pressure is how many of us already have it.

The second shock is how many more of us are going to have it.

The third shock is how few of us are doing much about it even though the major answers stare us in the face.

The U.S. Dietary Guideline on sodium below gives these answers:

Eating less sodium can help you prevent high blood pressure if you're prone to it.

Eating much less sodium can help you

lower your blood pressure if it's already high.

How to eat less sodium. Sodium is everywhere in our diet. Table salt is nearly 50% sodium. Sodium is found in significant amounts in many condiments. And in moderate amounts in meat, poultry, fish, milk, ice cream, and other dairy products. It is found in lesser amounts in vegetables, grains and fruits.

Sodium is in some frozen foods, canned foods, packaged foods, soups, and snacks. The label usually tells you which of

these products have salt and other sodium compounds.

Sodium is in some fruit juices, sodas, and even drinking water. Most of us eat far more sodium than we need.

Here are three principles to help you avoid too much sodium:

1. *Eat a variety of foods from all the basic food groups.*

2. *Balance the foods you eat.* Don't eat too much of any one type of food, especially the salty ones.

3. *Moderate the use of your saltshaker—in your kitchen and at the table.*

Read the U.S. Dietary Guideline below. It is one of seven Guidelines General Foods is reprinting for your study. They are: 1. Eat a variety of foods. 2. Maintain ideal weight. 3. Avoid too much fat, saturated fat and cholesterol. 4. Eat foods with adequate starch and fiber. 5. Avoid too much sugar. 6. Avoid too much sodium. 7. If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation.

1. What is sodium? Why do you need it? Sodium is a mineral and an essential nutrient. Without it your body cannot keep the fluid in and around its cells in proper balance. The amount of sodium you actually need each day is what you'd get in a pinch of table salt. But a healthy body can generally tolerate much more, which most of us ask it to.

2. Do you get sodium from "natural" food and drink, as well as from "processed" foods? Meat, poultry, fish, milk, cheese and other dairy products, and other foods from animal sources are relatively high in sodium well before you add seasonings to them.

Sodium also occurs naturally in grains, and in fruits and vegetables and their juices.

It is estimated that about 25% of the sodium you eat comes from these naturally occurring sources. Approximately 50% comes from packaged foods where salt and other sodium compounds are used to enhance flavor, maintain freshness, and to provide leavening.

Finally, about 25% of the sodium you eat comes from the salt and seasonings you add to food when you cook and at the table.

3. What are some other lesser-known sources of sodium? Sodium is in seasonings such as garlic salt, soy sauce, steak sauce, onion or celery salt. It's also in baking powder, baking soda, pickling solutions, and flavor enhancers.

It's in medicines such as antacids, analgesics, and laxatives.

And it may be in drinking water, particularly home-softened water.

4. What is the major health hazard from eating too much sodium? High blood pressure. This, in turn, increases risk of stroke, heart problems and kidney disease.

U.S. Dietary Guidelines

6 Avoid Too Much Sodium

Table salt contains sodium and chloride—both are essential elements.

Sodium is also present in many beverages and foods that we eat, especially in certain processed foods, condiments, sauces, pickled foods, salty snacks, and sandwich meats. Baking soda, baking powder, monosodium glutamate (MSG), soft drinks, and even many medications (many antacids, for instance) contain sodium.

It is not surprising that adults in the United States take in much more sodium than they need.

The major hazard of excessive sodium is for persons who have high blood pressure. Not everyone is equally susceptible. In the United States, approximately 17 percent of adults have high blood pressure. Sodium intake is but one of the factors known to affect blood pressure. Obesity, in particular, seems to play a major role.

In populations with low-sodium intakes, high blood pressure is rare. In contrast, in populations with high-sodium intakes, high blood pressure is common. If people with high blood pressure severely restrict their sodium intakes, their blood pressures will usually fall—although not always to normal levels.

At present, there is no good way to predict who will develop high blood pressure, though certain groups, such as blacks, have a higher incidence. Low-sodium diets might help some of these people avoid high blood pressure if they could be identified before they develop the condition.

Since most Americans eat more sodium than is needed, consider reducing your sodium intake. Use less table salt. Eat sparingly those foods to which large amounts of sodium have been added. Remember that up to half of sodium intake may be "hidden," either as part of the naturally occurring food or, more often, as part of a preservative or flavoring agent that has been added.

To avoid too much sodium

- Learn to enjoy the unsalted flavors of foods.
- Cook with only small amounts of added salt.
- Add little or no salt to food at the table.
- Limit your intake of salty foods, such as potato chips, pretzels, salted nuts and popcorn, condiments (soy sauce, steak sauce, garlic salt), cheese, pickled foods, cured meats.
- Read food labels carefully to determine the amounts of sodium in processed foods and snack items.

Note: Numbers and underlinings are for editorial comment by General Foods.

5. What other factors beside excess sodium can contribute to high blood pressure? What can you do about them? A tendency to high blood pressure can be handed down to you through heredity.

Diabetes is often associated with high blood pressure. So is being overweight, or being under too much stress for too long.

For these reasons, you should have your blood pressure checked every year. And your children's blood pressure. High blood pressure can begin in childhood.

If your blood pressure is high, follow your doctor's directions. Take your medicine. Trim your weight. And try to be kinder to yourself, to lessen stress and anxiety.

6. If you don't have high blood pressure now, and have no known family history of it, should you still moderate your sodium? If you're healthy and have normal blood pressure, you can tolerate far more sodium than your body needs. Even so, there are limits.

The National Academy of Sciences has recommended, for normal, healthy people, a range of 1100 to 3300 milligrams of sodium a day as a safe intake. This is about the amount of sodium in 1/2 to 1 1/2 measuring teaspoons of table salt.

Moderation is especially wise if you're slowly putting on weight, reaching middle age, or under pressure from taking on more of life's burdens than you bargained for.

7. Can you splurge occasionally on highly salted foods and still be safe? If you have no history of high blood pressure and are otherwise healthy, you should be able to enjoy moderate amounts of salty foods, such as salty ham, nuts, pickles, or other high-sodium delicacies.

8. If you cut back on salt, won't the result be tasteless? Not tasteless. Different. Your taste for extra salt is an acquired one, which can be un-acquired.

Most people can readily adjust to using less salt in anywhere from a couple of weeks to a few months.

Start with obvious changes: Replace salty snacks with unsalty ones, like raw vegetables. Substitute peanuts in the shell for salted peanuts. Look for unsalted foods in the supermarket. Learn to use other seasonings in place of salt, such as herbs, lemon, onion.

9. What is the fastest, easiest way to cut back on sodium? Change your current relationship with your saltshaker. If you automatically shake before you eat, *taste* before you shake.

Don't keep your saltshaker on the table. Buy a shaker with fewer, smaller holes. Think about your saltshaker. Reserve its use for foods that simply can't do without it.

10. How do you read a label for clues to sodium content? The list of ingredients will include salt and other sodium compounds (such as monosodium glutamate, sodium citrate), which have been added to the product in its preparation. But the amount of sodium per serving is required to be listed *only* if the product is represented as a low-sodium product or one which promotes controlled sodium use.

General Foods is voluntarily proceeding with plans to label the amount of sodium in its products where the sodium level is of dietary significance.

General Foods urges you to study the U.S. Dietary Guidelines

