

Halt the Salt?

Recipes to help control excess sodium in your day-to-day diet

By Melanie Peters | May 07, 2015

Our bodies require sodium to function, but how much we need versus how much we consume are often quite different things. While the recommended daily allowance for sodium seems reasonable (less than 2,300 milligrams a day), most Americans consume much, much more. The reasons are varied and complex. Many foods we eat contain naturally occurring sodium. Most processed foods, of which Americans eat quite a bit, have added sodium.



Why do we need sodium? Sodium controls blood pressure, maintains hydration and helps our nerves and muscles function properly. A deficiency of sodium can cause headaches, nausea, muscle spasms and, [in extreme cases](#), death. Too much sodium in the diet, however, can lead to high blood pressure, kidney disease and congestive heart failure so controlling intake is important to maintaining the

balance between what our bodies need and what can be harmful to our health.

While many foods naturally contain sodium, such as milk, green leafy vegetables and some beans, the majority of our sodium intake comes from sodium chloride, aka [table salt](#) and salt added to processed foods, such as lunch meats, canned soups and other prepared foods. What makes controlling our sodium intake difficult is that the majority of sodium we consume has already been added to our food well before we reach for the salt shaker. According to the American Heart Association, more than 75 percent of the sodium in the average American diet comes from salt added to processed foods. Too much sodium, according to current dietary guidelines, is more than the amount in one teaspoon of salt.



One teaspoon of salt? Dietary salt intake has been a controversial topic for years. The topic was recently shaken up again when a study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* last year questioned the [current guidelines](#) [↗](#), suggesting that they are too low and possibly “dangerous.” While the debate over how much salt is enough (or too much) rages on, one thing is clear: processed and

pre-packaged food makes up to 60 percent of the food we purchase.

So how to maintain a healthy balance? The best way to avoid too much salt intake is to eat foods already low in [naturally occurring sodium](#) [↗](#), like fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lean meats and low-fat dairy products, and to limit your intake of processed and prepared foods. Here are recipes to help you replace some of those easy-to-reach salty processed favorites with make-at-home healthier alternatives.

Lima Bean, Mushroom and Barley Soup:

Canned soups are often high in sodium, but are a life-saver when reaching for a quick, easy lunch. Why not whip up a big pot of this protein-rich soup for a week of easy-to-heat lunches?

Dark Chocolate Chip Oat Bars:

Bars are great for breakfast on-the-go or an easy snack. These chewy, chocolatey bars are no exception.

Picnic Potato Salad:

What’s a cook-out without potato salad? Instead of heading to the deli counter for container of prepared, high-sodium potato salad, try this unique spin on the traditional, mayonnaise-based salad. The secret is in the rosemary vinaigrette!

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