



**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF  
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE**  
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## **Cut the Salt. Get the Facts.**

### ***Your Food, Your Health***

#### **Why should we be concerned about salt?**

Our bodies need salt to function, but too much can be harmful. Excessive salt intake raises blood pressure, increasing the risk of heart attack and stroke. Our daily salt intake has increased by more than 50% over the past few decades. Most Americans now consume about twice the recommended daily limit of sodium, the component of salt that affects blood pressure. The recommended sodium limit is 1,500mg for most adults and 2,300mg for others. By limiting salt intake we can lower blood pressure and reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke.

#### **Where does most of the salt in the diet come from?**

Almost 80% of the salt in our diets comes from packaged and prepared foods, and the foods that contribute the most of the salt to our diets don't always taste salty. A single bran muffin can have twice as much salt as a bag of potato chips. Because we don't actively choose the salt in our diets, even health-conscious people tend to consume more than they mean to.

#### **Why is reducing everyone's salt intake important?**

A high-salt diet is especially dangerous for people who already have high blood pressure – a condition affecting 67% of adults over 60. However, lowering salt intake also benefits people with normal blood pressure. When you lower your blood pressure, even if it is not abnormally high, you lower your risk of heart attacks and stroke.

#### **Don't our kidneys filter out excess salt?**

Yes, but the kidneys can't counter the long-term effects of excessive salt intake.

#### **What does "salt-sensitive" mean?**

Some people are especially sensitive to the effects of dietary salt on blood pressure. Current levels of salt consumption places these people at extreme risk of hypertension, heart attacks or strokes – often in the absence of any outward symptoms.

#### **Why reduce everyone's salt intake if only certain people are at risk?**

"Salt sensitive" can be a misleading term. We know that salt affects blood pressure more dramatically in certain groups (e.g., African Americans and people over 40). But it's a matter of degree, not a difference in kind. No test can predict how salt will affect an individual's blood pressure, but we know that high blood pressure is more common in populations with high-salt diets than those with low-salt diets.

**Table salt provides iodine. Will reducing salt intake lead to iodine deficiency?**

The targets will not affect the iodized salt that most consumers use in their own kitchens. Reducing the salt in processed foods is unlikely to have a significant effect on iodine levels because many manufacturers use non-iodized salt.

**Can manufacturers reduce salt content without compromising food safety?**

Yes. While salt has properties that can help preserve and stabilize food, salt can still be reduced in most foods without affecting safety or quality. Similar food products already vary widely in salt content, and companies in other countries have reduced salt levels without compromising safety.

**How will reducing salt affect the taste of foods?**

The food industry has already achieved large reductions in some products without offending consumers' taste buds. In the United Kingdom, manufacturers have reduced salt levels by more than half in some products. Studies show that consumers' palates adjust quickly to changes in the norm.

**What if a product is reformulated and the public doesn't like the new taste?**

In the United Kingdom, consumers and manufacturers have readily accepted the gradual decline in salt levels across a wide range of products. Similar progress is achievable in the United States, if food makers are willing to develop lower-salt products and recipes that consumers like.

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