

The Shake on Salt

Canadians have developed a taste for salt. Sodium is a nutrient found in table salt and many other foods and most of us eat more than double the amount we need each day. Too much sodium puts stress on our hearts and can put our health at risk.

February is Heart Month; a great time to learn about how reducing the amount of sodium we eat can help keep our “tickers” healthy.

Adults only need about 1500 mg of sodium each day for good health. This small amount of sodium helps to regulate body fluids and blood pressure and it also keeps our muscles and nerves running smoothly. Unfortunately, most of us consume around 3400 mg which can lead to high blood pressure - a major risk factor for stroke, heart disease and kidney disease.

Some sodium occurs naturally in foods, but most is added for flavour and preservation. All types of salt, including sea salt, kosher salts and other gourmet salts contain similar amounts of sodium.

Over 75 per cent of the sodium we eat comes from processed foods such as cheeses, deli meats, sauces and soups, packaged and ready-to-eat foods, pizza, fast foods and restaurant meals. Sodium is also found in lesser amounts in many foods that don't taste salty such as bread, baked goods, and breakfast cereals.

Take these simple steps to reduce the amount of sodium that you eat:

- Create meals at home from fresh unprocessed foods.
- Eat fewer packaged, ready to eat and take out foods.
- Use the Nutrition Facts table to compare products and choose products that are lower in sodium.
- Add little or no salt to food when cooking and remove the salt shaker from your table.

Easy access to low sodium foods can help us all make better choices. Use your voice and your buying power to send a message to the food industry to offer lower sodium products:

- Call or email your favourite food companies and request lower sodium products.
- Let your money do the talking. Use Nutrition Facts tables to compare products and purchase products that are lowest in sodium.
- Choose to eat at restaurants and food outlets that provide nutrition information such as those that participate in the informed dining program. Choose foods with less sodium.

Eating less sodium can help you and your family stay healthy and feel your best. Now that's something to take to heart.

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