



FOR YOUR DIABETES LIFE!

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Slash the Salt?

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Everything you need to know to lower your sodium intake for better heart health.

By Sheila Buff



If everyone in America cut their salt intake to no more than 1,500 mg a day (the equivalent of 2/3 of a teaspoon), 16 million cases of [high blood pressure](#) would be prevented every year, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control.

But you're an individual, not a [statistic](#). Should you cut back on your own salt intake? The research says yes, if you fall into one of these categories:

- You have diabetes or prediabetes
- You have high blood pressure or prehypertension
- You have [kidney disease](#) or are at high risk for it
- You're a post-menopausal woman
- You're African-American
- You're over age 40

Is that you and most people you know? According to a recent study from the CDC, nearly 70 percent of all adult Americans need to cut back on their salt intake — a lot. Even if you don't have diabetes, high blood pressure, or any other health problem, you might be just naturally sensitive to salt. Researchers estimate that one in four people are "salt sensitive" and this makes them more likely to die from [heart attacks](#).

Today the average American consumes some 3,400 mg — the equivalent of about 2 1/2 teaspoons — of salt every day. Just about every healthy authority agrees that's way too much. Organizations such as the American Heart Association and the Institute of Medicine recommend an upper limit of 1,500 mg (2/3 of a teaspoon). The [2010 version of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) also recommends 1,500 mg, down from 2,300 mg in earlier versions.

Is Salt Messing with Your Medicine?

Reducing salt intake may be necessary to make your [prescription drugs](#) work, too. About 20 to 30 percent of people with high blood pressure are resistant to drugs. Their blood pressure stays too high even though they might be taking three different medications to lower it. If you're in that group, you know how frustrating it is to take your pills faithfully and still see your numbers refuse to come down.

A recent study suggests that a high-salt diet could be part of the problem. Too much salt may decrease the effectiveness of drugs used to treat patients with resistant hypertension. In the study, a group of patients with resistant hypertension went on a low-salt diet for just one week — and saw their blood pressure drop by an average of nearly 23 points systolic (the top number) and 9 points diastolic (the bottom number). Their salt intake wasn't extremely low. It was limited to half a teaspoon a day — close to the amount authorities recommend for everyone.

Where's the Salt?

It's not just a matter of hiding the salt shaker. Three-quarters of the salt in the average diet comes from [restaurant food](#) and processed foods such as soup, tomato sauce, [snack foods](#), and canned foods. That makes extra salt hard to avoid, but there are plenty of simple ways to cut back. Frozen vegetables, for instance, have far less salt — and usually more nutrition overall — than the canned versions. You can use the % Daily Value (%DV) for sodium (the culprit ingredient in salt) on the [nutrition facts label](#) of food packages to make better choices. Foods that are 5 percent or less of the %DV for sodium are low in salt; foods that are 20 percent or more are high in salt. If you mostly stick to foods that are 5 percent or less, your taste buds will hardly notice the difference, but your blood pressure might.

>> **NEXT:** [Reduce salt in your diet](#) >>

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