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South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control

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Why Should I Limit Sodium?

Salt is sodium chloride. Sodium is an element that's needed for good health. You must have a certain balance of sodium and water in your body at all times. Too much salt or too much water in your system will upset the balance. When you're healthy, your kidneys get rid of extra sodium to keep the correct balance of sodium and water.

What's bad about sodium?

In some people, too much sodium leads to or aggravates high blood pressure. Having less sodium in your diet may help you avoid high blood pressure. People with high blood pressure are more likely to develop heart disease and stroke.

How much sodium do I need?

- The average American eats about 2,900 to 4,300 mg of sodium, or about 6 to 10 grams of salt, daily.
- Healthy Americans should try to eat less than 2,300 mg of salt per day.
- Some people — African Americans, middle-aged and older adults, and those with high blood pressure — need less than 1,500 mg per day.
- Your doctor may tell you to cut salt out completely.

What are sources of sodium?

Most of the sodium in our diets comes from adding it when food is being prepared. Pay attention to food labels, because they tell how much sodium is in food products.

Here's a list of sodium compounds to limit in your diet:

- Salt (sodium chloride or NaCl)
- Monosodium glutamate (MSG)
- Baking soda
- Baking powder
- Disodium phosphate
- Any compound that has "sodium" or "Na" in its name

What foods should I limit?

- Salted snacks
- Fish that's frozen, pre-breaded, pre-fried or smoked; also fish that's canned in oil or brine like tuna, sardines or shellfish
- Ham, bacon, corned beef, luncheon meats, sausages and hot dogs
- Canned foods and juices containing salt
- Commercially made main dishes like hash, meat pies and frozen dinners with more than 700 mg of sodium per serving
- Cheeses and buttermilk
- Seasoned salts, meat tenderizers and MSG
- Ketchup, mayonnaise, sauces and salad dressings

What else can I do?

- Avoid adding table salt to foods.
- Use salt substitutes (with your doctor's approval) or herbs and spices.
- Eat fresh lean meats, skinless poultry, fish, egg whites and tuna canned in water.
- Choose unsalted nuts and low-sodium peanut butter. Cook dried peas and beans.
- Use products made without added salt; try low-sodium bouillon and soups and unsalted, fat-free broth.
- Rinse canned vegetables, beans and shellfish to reduce salt.

How can I learn more?

1. Talk to your doctor, nurse or other health-care professionals. If you have heart disease or have had a stroke, members of your family also may be at higher risk. It's very important for them to make changes now to lower their risk.
2. Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit americanheart.org to learn more about heart disease.
3. For information on stroke, call 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) or visit StrokeAssociation.org.

We have many other fact sheets and educational booklets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one.

Knowledge is power, so *Learn and Live*!

What are the warning signs of heart attack and stroke?

Warning Signs of Heart Attack

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense, but most of them start slowly with mild pain or discomfort with one or more of these symptoms:

- **Chest discomfort**
- **Discomfort in other areas of the upper body**
- **Shortness of breath with or without chest discomfort**
- **Other signs including breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness**

Warning Signs of Stroke

- **Sudden weakness or numbness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body**
- **Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding**
- **Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes**
- **Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination**
- **Sudden, severe headache with no known cause**

Learn to recognize a stroke. Time lost is brain lost.

Call 9-1-1 … Get to a hospital immediately if you experience signs of a heart attack or stroke!

Do you have questions or comments for your doctor?

Take a few minutes to write your own questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider. For example:

What's my daily sodium limit? _____ _____

Is there sodium in the medicine I take? _____ _____

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Your contribution to the American Heart Association supports research that helps make publications like this possible.

The statistics in this sheet were up to date at publication. For the latest statistics, see the Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics Update at americanheart.org/statistics.

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