

September 19, 2014



# Share the Wellness Tip

## When To Hold The Salt

How much salt is too much? Salt — sodium chloride — isn't inherently bad. It enhances flavors and has important functions in baking bread, producing cheeses and preserving meats. It's considered an essential nutrient because it helps regulate body fluids, but the body works just fine on 500 milligrams (mg) a day.

While most foods contain a little sodium naturally, far more is added to our foods. A cup of chopped raw tomato has 9 mg, for instance. Compare that to a cup of conventionally canned tomatoes that has 343 mg. Switch to a can of no-salt-added tomatoes and the sodium drops to 24 mg per cup. Meanwhile, a 1-cup serving of condensed tomato soup has 675 mg of sodium.

U.S. nutrition guidelines recommend 2,300 mg of sodium or less a day. That's the amount of sodium in 1 teaspoon of salt (sodium chloride). However, this recommendation drops to 1,500 mg a day for people age 51 and older, all African-Americans, and anyone with high blood pressure, diabetes or chronic kidney disease -- that's about 70 percent of American adults.

And yet, on average, we consume a whopping 3,400 mg of sodium a day.

You can find the amount of sodium in packaged food sold in stores by looking at the Nutrition Facts label. The amount of sodium per serving is listed in milligrams. The sodium content of packaged and prepared foods can vary widely. You can compare the sodium content of similar products and choose the one with the lowest amount of sodium you can find.

### Sodium-related listings you may find on food packages:

**Sodium Free-** Less than 5 milligrams of sodium per serving and contains no sodium chloride

**Very low sodium-** 35 milligrams or less per serving

**Low-sodium-** 140 milligrams or less per serving

**Reduced (or less) sodium-** At least 25 percent less sodium per serving than the usual sodium level

**Light (for sodium-reduced products)-** If the food is "low calorie" and "low fat" and sodium is reduced by at least 50 percent per serving

**Light in sodium-** If sodium is reduced by at least 50 percent per serving

Food labels cannot claim a product is "healthy" if it has more than 480 mg of sodium per labeled serving (for individual foods) or more than 600 mg of sodium per labeled serving for meals/main dishes, according to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Many food makers are taking steps to appeal to the public palate and work with regulators. That's why you'll find more products at the market in low- and lower-sodium versions. Ultimately, the choice is yours.

*Sources: U.S. Food and Drug Administration, American Heart Association*

