

# Shakin' it up with the Skinny on Salt

*The Danger is Not in the Shaker*

-- By Laura Bofinger



Even if you are not a potato chip and pretzel junkie, you're probably eating more salt than you realize. Sodium, the main ingredient in table salt, can hide in places you don't suspect, like in ketchup, frozen dinners, instant hot cereals and some medications.

## What's Harmful About Sodium?

High levels of sodium can cause the body to retain too much fluid. This can be harmful to people with high blood pressure or heart, liver or kidney diseases. People with these conditions should be especially careful about sodium intake. But there's some debate on whether everyone needs to worry about all of this salt talk. We'll listen to the USDA, who recommends that we need to choose and prepare foods with less sodium. The average American adult consumes about 2,500 to 5,000 milligrams of sodium a day. But we only need 1,100 to 3,300 milligrams, or about 1/2 to 1-1/2 teaspoons. That can be a pretty big difference.

## Where are we getting so much sodium in our diets?

Think about all the times we add salt during cooking or as a seasoning to a prepared meal. Surprisingly, our own salt shaking doesn't compare to the major sources of "hidden" sodium in our diets found in processed foods and baked products. Some examples include salad dressings, mustard, meat tenderizer, cheeses, instant foods, pickles, canned vegetables and soups, salsa and barbecue sauce. Even common medications such as antacids, laxatives and cough remedies contain sodium compounds.

Some label terms can help our purchase decisions:

Term	Means
sodium free or salt free	less than 5 milligrams of sodium per serving
low sodium	140 milligrams or less of sodium per serving
reduced or less sodium	at least 25% less sodium than the food's standard serving
light sodium	50% less sodium than the food's standard serving
unsalted or no salt added	no salt added during processing, but could contain naturally occurring sodium

## Steps to Reduce Your Sodium

- Limit your use of the salt shaker. Try a shaker with smaller holes.
- Substitute salt seasoning with other flavorings, such as onion, garlic, lemon, vinegar, black pepper, or parsley.
- Choose fresh, frozen or canned vegetables without added salt.
- Cook fresh or frozen fish, poultry and meat more often than canned or processed forms.
- Compare the amounts of sodium in various brands of frozen dinners, packaged mixes, cereals, cheese, breads, salad dressings, soups and sauces. Sodium content varies widely among different brands.
- Rinse canned beans and vegetables to remove added salt before cooking.
- Choose foods labeled "low sodium," "reduced sodium" or "sodium free."
- Know how much sodium is in your favorite condiments, especially soy sauce, steak sauce, ketchup and salsa. Limit your intake accordingly.
- Try to limit your daily sodium intake to less than 2,300 milligrams.

One thing that the experts do agree on is that getting a balanced diet with more fruits and vegetables is more important than obsessing over one ingredient, like sodium. So it's good to be mindful of how much sodium you're taking in, but concentrate more on an overall nutritious diet.

