How Much is Recommended?

The sodium recommendation is 2400mg, or 1 teaspoon at most per day. With salt, the less the better. Luckily, it is an acquired taste so our taste buds can be retrained to eat foods that are lower in sodium.

Nutrition Labels

Being able to read labels is important when it comes to watching your sodium intake. When looking at it on a nutrition label it helps to look at the % Daily Value, as shown in the Nutrition Label picture. This is a fast way to tell if there is too much or if it is ok to buy. Here is a general rule of thumb.

- < 10% = Low in salt; good
- 10-20% = Moderately high; use some caution
- >20% = High; eat only in small portions or cut out.

What Can I Do To Reduce Sodium?

There are many ways to reduce sodium such as not adding salt to your meal at the dinner table or cutting back on how much you use in your dish. Here are some more tips:

- When cooking use more seasonings such as garlic, onion, basil, or oregano in replacement of some of the sodium you cut out.
- Use frozen vegetables over canned; if you prefer canned veggies then rinse them with cold water. This will reduce the sodium by 40%.
- Stay away from smoked meats and nuts as they are high in sodium; instead get baked or broiled meats and natural nuts.
- Watch your condiments! Not only can they be high in sugar but in salt as well. Buy low-sodium versions when possible.
- Try to stay away from gravies and mixes such as taco seasoning or choose lower sodium products.
- When buying frozen foods choose meals that are 600mg or less.
- Lunchmeats are a high source of sodium; if you like to cook make your own lunchmeat from chicken or turkey. Otherwise, try and choose the one with the lowest content.
- Try to limit or cut out meats such as bacon, salami, pastrami, and hot dogs as they are full of sodium.
What is Hypertension?

Hypertension, or high blood pressure, happens when the sodium can’t be excreted efficiently enough. This can be caused by kidney disease, but for the majority of people with hypertension it is unclear why this happens.

The sodium is in the blood stream pulling in more water increasing the blood volume, putting more pressure on the walls of the arteries. The pressure can cause tears to form leading to clotting. The clotting attracts plaque (cholesterol and fats in the blood) to stick and can lead to blockages. The blockages can cause heart attack, stroke, or kidney disease.

More than Just NaCl

Sodium is a simple cube structure made up of NaCl, or sodium chloride. There are actually many different forms of salt, but we are concerned mainly with table salt. Sodium has many functions in food as well as for our bodies.

In cooking it adds flavor to a dish as well as acts as a preserver of food by inhibiting the growth of bacteria, molds, and yeast. Another role that salt plays in food is that it can control the fermentation process in cheese and bread dough helping to turn out a better product.

Salt is also valuable to the body. It acts as an electrolyte which means it helps regulate how much fluid is in our bodies as well as help move minerals into cells. It also helps our muscles contract, transmit electrical nerve impulses, and maintain our body’s acid/base balance.

If Salt’s So Good, Then Why Is It So Bad?

Our bodies keep a tight control over how much sodium it has, secreting salt if there's too much. Not a lot of salt is needed by the body, only 1/10 of a teaspoon a day. How much is that? Take a teaspoon and fill it with salt and take out half. Then, take out another half. Then take out another half and you have 1/10 of a teaspoon, it is that small of an amount!

The problem is most people generally consume about 2 teaspoons, or 5000mg, a day! Over time this can harm our bodies, especially for people who are “sodium-sensitive”. These people are prone to hypertension.

FYI

What about sea salt? Is it better for you? Not really; sea salt contains the same amount of sodium chloride as table salt per teaspoon so this should be regulated as well. Using sea salt is a personal preference as some people might like the taste better or for how it performs in baking.

Remember: the less processed the food the better it is for you!

Additional Information:

www.nutrition.gov - Good for understanding what is salt, the content in foods, and other resources.

http://www.cdc.gov/features/sodium/- Overall information on sodium with list of websites for more information on sodium related subjects.