



SALT Controversy?

If you've heard the recommendation that we should eat less salt, then you've also probably heard the counter-argument that salt is not a problem. With conflicting reports, it may be hard to decide what you should do with the salt shaker.



Salt or Sodium

Salt and sodium are often used interchangeably, but they do in fact mean different things. When it comes to health, sodium is what we are concerned with. What we typically refer to as salt, is actually a mix of sodium and chloride. Sodium is found in a variety of the foods we eat, and even in some drinks both as part of the food's natural make up or from salt that is added during preparation or processing.



How much is too much?

Despite the appearance of a controversy about sodium intake and health, there is strong evidence, with widespread agreement, that most of us are taking in way too much sodium. The average American takes in about 3,400 mg of sodium per day. The recommended limit for healthy adults is 2,300 mg per day. There is evidence to suggest that we may actually need to go lower, to 1,500 mg per day, but this is where it starts to get somewhat controversial. Some feel 1,500 is too low. Even if this is the case, it is important to remember that we have a lot of work to do to get to 2,300 before we should even start to worry if 1,500 is too low.



How to be salt smart:

Lowering sodium can be as simple as making a few small changes. A big chunk of the sodium we get comes from processed foods, so comparing labels and choosing products with lower sodium levels can help. When cooking at home or eating out, choosing foods flavored with herbs and spices instead of salt and other high sodium ingredients can also make a dent. Don't forget to keep an eye on your drinks too. Sports drinks designed to replace electrolytes during exercise contain more sodium than you need if you aren't heavily sweating. While you are working on your sodium levels, don't forget about another important mineral - potassium. Unlike sodium, this one we tend not to get enough of. Fruits and vegetables are a great source of potassium and naturally low in sodium - a win-win for your mineral balance!

REFERENCES:

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2. Institute of Medicine. 2013. "Sodium intake in populations: assessment of evidence." Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2013.