**DATE:** May 11, 2021

**Salty Situation.** Do you ever wonder if you should work on reducing sodium or salt intake? We hear many different messages about reducing the amount of sodium, salt, and sodium containing ingredients in the foods we eat. Surprisingly, sodium is found more often in processed foods, such as casseroles, pizza, and cold cuts, than what you add from your saltshaker. Understanding how much sodium you need and knowing how to identify foods high in sodium can help you easily make changes in your diet.

Sodium chloride, more commonly known as salt, is roughly 40% sodium and 60% chloride; it is used to flavor food and is also often used as a binder and stabilizer. Salt is also commonly used as a food preservative since bacteria is unable to thrive in high amounts of salt. Sodium is not all bad, the human body requires a small amount of sodium (estimated to be about 500 mg) for vital functions such as conducting nerve impulses, contracting and relaxing muscles, and maintaining the proper balance of water and minerals[[1]](#endnote-1). However, too much sodium in our diet can lead to high blood pressure, heart disease, and stroke. Additionally, too much sodium in our diet may weaken bones by pulling calcium from them, which is something we need to avoid as we age.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans[[2]](#endnote-2) recommends limiting daily sodium intake to less than 2,300 milligrams. Eating too much sodium may lead to high blood pressure, which may increase the risk for a heart attack and stroke. Most Americans consume far more sodium per day than we need; the average American is estimated to consume at least 3400 mg of sodium per day. Reducing sodium, which includes salt or other sodium containing ingredients, is beneficial in reducing risks for health-related conditions.

Reading the nutrition facts label (found on most food containers) will help you identify foods low or high in sodium. The percent daily value (based on a 2000 calorie per day diet) listed on the nutrition facts label can help you quickly determine if a food is low or high in sodium. Pay close attention to the serving size listed on a food label and make sure the amount you eat matches the amount on the label. Information listed on the nutrition facts label is per serving (as described on the label) and most serving sizes are much smaller than what we think. For example, when you eat a bowl of soup, how many saltine crackers do you eat? The serving size for saltine crackers is 5 crackers. Five crackers roughly contain 135 mg or 6% of the recommended daily value. If you eat ten crackers with your soup, you need to double the numbers listed on the label, bringing your sodium intake up to 270 mg or 12% of the recommended daily value… and this is just the crackers, how much sodium is in the soup?

You may be shocked to learn how much sodium is in some of your favorite foods. Major sources of sodium include processed foods like canned products, breads, deli meats, snack foods, and mixed dishes. For healthier options, look for foods labeled as low or reduced sodium. The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute[[3]](#endnote-3) recommends adopting the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) eating plan to help reduce sodium intake and reduce the risk of high blood-pressure. Please contact the Rains County Texas A&M AgriLife Extension office if you would like more information on the DASH eating plan.

If you have questions or concerns, please contact me, (903) 473-4580 or email Sarah.Latham@ag.tamu.edu. You may also read more about this and many more topics on my blog, http://agentsarah.blogspot.com/. To view upcoming events or additional information please visit https://rains.agrilife.org/ or follow Rains County AgriLife on Facebook.

1. Harvard School of Public Health. (2021). *Salt and Sodium*. The Nutrition Source. https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/salt-and-sodium/ [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. (2020). *2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines*. https://health.gov/our-work/food-nutrition/previous-dietary-guidelines/2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. (2021). *DASH Eating Plan*. https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/dash-eating-plan. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)