Salt is the primary source of sodium in our diet. Our bodies need sodium for muscles and nerves to work properly, but only a small amount is necessary for this purpose. High intake of sodium is associated with high blood pressure, which is a major risk factor for heart disease, stroke, and kidney disease.

Traditional Asian cuisines can be quite healthy compared to the American versions frequently consumed today. In fact, many authentic Asian diets consist mainly of vegetables, with only about 20% of total calories coming from meat. However, salt is heavily used in some Asian sauces and marinades like patis (fish sauce) and harm ha (shrimp sauce). It is also heavily used to preserve some traditional foods like salted fish, pickled vegetables, and cured beef. These food items do not have to be completely eliminated if used sparingly, but selecting and preparing foods that reduce the amount of salt eaten can make you and your family healthier. For tips on reducing your salt intake, see the boxed section below.

Most people, but not all, may benefit from lowering the sodium content of their diets. Consult your healthcare provider regarding the best diet for you.

The FAQs (frequently asked questions) below provide answers to what many people want to know about salt.

**ASIAN FOODS: REDUCE THE SALT**

**CHOOSE**
- Salt-free seasonings: ginger, garlic, onion, fresh herbs, chilies, vinegar, lemongrass, cloves, splash of sesame oil, lemon or lime juice
- Foods steamed or stir-fried with water or a little peanut or sesame oil
- Sauces added sparingly – only after cooking
- Miso (fermented soybean paste), broths and powdered sauces diluted with more water than directed on labels
- Fresh fish, tofu and other soybean products; eat lean meats, pork and chicken

**CHOOSE LESS**
- Salt, patis and other fish sauces, ajinomoto (MSG), harm ha (shrimp sauce), black bean sauce, oyster sauce, ponzu sauce
- Dried, canned, salted fish and meats or salt-fermented seafood
- Fried foods with salted batters
- Heavily salted marinades and pickled foods
- Miso and powdered sauces prepared as directed on labels

For more information, visit: www.hawaiifoods.hawaii.edu

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

This information explains how salt affects your body and how to make healthier food choices.

Q: Does everyone need to be on a sodium-reduced diet?
A: Not everyone needs to restrict the sodium in their diet. For example, some elderly individuals may actually require more salt in their diets. Before changing your sodium intake, check with your health care provider to see if a salt-reduced diet is right for you.

Q: Why should I worry about my salt intake?
A: Although the body requires sodium to work properly, too much sodium can increase your blood pressure. High blood pressure, which doctors call hypertension, makes the heart work harder. This can cause damage to blood vessels and organs like the kidneys, which increases risk for heart disease, stroke, and kidney disease.

Q: Okay, I have to limit my sodium. But how much sodium is too much?
A: Most people consume more sodium than they need. Current recommendations indicate sodium intake should be less than 2300mg per day. This is equal to about one teaspoon of salt. However, much of the salt we eat is already in prepared foods, and more is often added during cooking or at the table.
Q: What can I do to consume less salt?
A: Eat foods that are lower in sodium. Read the Nutrition Facts Label and the percent Daily Value for sodium (% DV). Use the 5-20 rule in deciding what products to buy:

- 5% DV (120mg) of sodium or less per serving is a low-sodium choice and should be selected.
- 20% DV (480mg) of sodium or more per serving is a high-sodium choice and should be avoided or eaten in moderation.

Make sure to consider the serving size you are eating. Eating more than one serving will increase your sodium intake.

To find foods with less sodium, check the food package for certain labels, called nutrient claims. Choose food products labeled “Low Sodium,” “Very Low Sodium,” and “Sodium Free.”

Q: If a product is “low sodium,” can I eat as much as I want?
A: No, eating more of the product will also increase the amount of sodium you consume. The product is labeled “low sodium” based on the sodium content for one serving. Therefore, eating two servings will double your sodium intake.

Q: Can I still eat my favorite foods and reduce my sodium intake?
A: Yes, you can still eat your favorite foods! Modifying your favorite recipes so they contain less salt allows you to reduce the sodium content. For example, omit the salt when cooking, use herbs and spices instead of salt to flavor foods, and either don’t sprinkle salt on foods at the table or use it sparingly to taste, not just out of habit.

Q: Will reducing sodium affect how food tastes? Will everything taste bland?
A: Research indicates that lowering salt intake by 20% is usually not noticeable, though it depends on the product. You may detect a change in taste, but after a few weeks your taste buds will adapt to low-sodium foods.

Q: Are there substitutes for salt to flavor foods?
A: In place of some or all of the salt, flavor foods with ginger, garlic, fresh or dried herbs, lemongrass, a splash of sesame oil, lemon or lime juice, and/or spices. Making foods hot and spicy can also help.

Q: The doctor said I am “salt sensitive.” What does that mean, and who else is like me?
A: Some people are more sensitive to salt than others. Salt sensitive people may have greater changes in their blood pressure when they eat salty foods. They tend to include the elderly, African-Americans, and some people with high blood pressure, diabetes, and/or chronic kidney disease.

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SODIUM CLAIMS AND WHAT THEY MEAN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SODIUM CLAIM</th>
<th>WHAT THEY MEAN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salt/Sodium Free</td>
<td>less than 5mg of sodium per serving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Low Sodium</td>
<td>35mg of sodium or less per serving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Sodium</td>
<td>140mg of sodium or less per serving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced Sodium</td>
<td>at least 25% less sodium than in the original product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light in Sodium or Lightly Salted</td>
<td>at least 50% less sodium than the regular product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Salt Added or Unsalted</td>
<td>no salt is added during processing, but not necessarily sodium-free</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Food and Drug Administration