How many times have you heard the health warning to eat less salt? There are many good reasons to consume less salt in your diet.

Salt contains sodium, a mineral when consumed at high levels can lead to significant health problems. Yet our bodies need a small amount of this mineral to properly function. For example, sodium helps the body balance fluids and keeps muscles and nerves working efficiently (Lewis 2021).

Salt, also known as sodium chloride, is used to flavor and preserve food. The various sources of sodium found in the diet, such as from additives and preservatives in many highly processed foods and the salt used in cooking and at the table, add up and contribute to the overall amount of sodium eaten in a day. You may have seen ingredients like monosodium glutamate (MSG) and sodium propionate, which serve as flavor enhancers and preservatives in various processed foods.

While many foods taste salty, like pickles and soy sauce, others have a significant amount of sodium but don’t taste very salty. Most of us do not think cereal or pastries taste salty, but many contain a considerable amount of sodium (U.S. Food and Drug Administration [FDA] 2021).

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020–2025 list the top sources of sodium in the diet. These foods include sandwiches, pizza, soups, crackers, pasta, cheese, desserts, sweet snacks, vegetables, and chips (U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2020).

A few smart shopping tips can help you select healthier, low-sodium items at the market. Let’s explore approaches to help you lower your sodium intake. These tips from the FDA (2021) can help you reduce sodium consumption.

Read the Nutrition Facts Label

The Nutrition Facts label will allow you to see how much sodium is in foods and beverages. The label is an excellent tool to use while grocery shopping. It allows you to determine the healthier choice by comparing the amount of sodium in different brands of the same type of foods and serving size. Some packaged foods will have sodium claims on the label. Here is an explanation of what those claims mean:

- **Sodium free or salt free**: less than 5 milligrams of sodium per serving
- **Very low sodium**: 35 milligrams of sodium or less per serving
- **Low sodium**: 140 milligrams of sodium or less per serving
- **Reduced sodium**: at least 25 percent less sodium than the regular product
- **No salt added or unsalted**: no salt was added during processing, but this does not mean it is sodium free
Prepare More Food at Home
Limit packaged sauces, mixes, and “instant” products. These foods usually have a high sodium content.

Add Flavor, Not Salt
Cut back on how much salt you add to foods as you cook, when baking, and at the table. No-salt seasonings are a good option and usually include a blend of herbs and spices, adding flavor to food.

Buy More Fresh Foods
When shopping for produce, select fresh, frozen without a sauce, and no-salt-added canned varieties for better low-sodium options. When it comes to meat, choose fresh meat, poultry, and seafood rather than processed varieties.

Rinse Away Sodium
Rinse sodium-containing canned foods, such as beans, tuna, and vegetables, with water before eating. This will remove some of the sodium.

Summary
Sodium, a component of salt, is only needed in a small amount each day to stay healthy. With the average American consuming much more than what is needed, reading labels and cooking at home more often are just two ways to help lower your daily sodium intake. Experiment using herbs and spices for seasoning to reduce or replace salt. Give the zesty chili and spice seasoning recipe below a try in soups, stews, sauces, and casseroles. Once prepared, store it in your pantry in an airtight container.

Recipe: Chili and Spice Seasoning
7 servings | Serving size: ⅛ of recipe

When preparing this recipe, start with clean countertops and utensils. Wash hands with soap and water.

Ingredients
4 Tablespoons paprika
2 Tablespoons oregano (dried, crushed)
2 teaspoons chili powder
2 teaspoons garlic powder
1 teaspoon ground black pepper
½ teaspoon cayenne pepper
½ teaspoon dry mustard

Directions
Mix together all ingredients. Store in airtight container.


References

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Code 6280 1M11/21MPC