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salt (sôlt) *n.* 1. A white crystalline substance that gives seawater its characteristic taste and is used for seasoning or preserving food.

2. A silent killer.



BY CHELSEY BOYLE
STURDY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

In a world filled with processed foods, it is no wonder that Americans are consuming too much sodium. So, if you think you're watching your sodium intake by just taking the salt shaker off the table, think again.

Seventy-five percent of our sodium consumption comes from processed and pre-packaged foods purchased regularly at our favorite grocery stores.

Sodium is an element that the body needs to work properly as it aids in controlling blood pressure and blood volume.

Your body also needs sodium for your muscles and nerves to work properly.

Salt contains sodium — table salt is made up of 40 percent sodium.

To put it into perspective, 1 teaspoon of salt contains nearly 2,300 milligrams of sodium.

Too much sodium in the diet is associated with the development of high blood pressure in some people and a serious buildup of fluid in people with congestive heart failure, cirrhosis of the liver, or kidney disease.

"When your body holds on to excess water, it causes strain on your blood vessels and your heart," says Sue Nordstrom, cardiac rehabilitation coordinator at Sturdy Memorial Hospital in Attleboro. "This can result in an increased risk of developing heart disease or having a stroke."

The "magic" of sodium is that it acts as both a preservative and a flavor enhancer.

Even more so — it can improve the texture and color of foods. It's not surprising that food manufacturers put it in everything from canned beans to the more unexpected foods such as bread.

To help create awareness of the unexpected foods with high levels of sodium, the American Heart Association (AHA) came up with the "Salty Six," six commonly consumed favorites including: breads and rolls, pizza, soup, cold cuts and cured meats, poultry and sandwiches.

When you make the decision to reduce your sodium intake, you need to arm yourself with knowledge.

"Understanding food labels can help you identify what foods you're eating that contain hidden salt," says Kathleen Blackledge, a registered dietitian at Sturdy. "While you should aim to eat fresh fruits, vegetables and well balanced meals cooked at home, it is not always possible. When looking at food labels, look for "no sodium added" or those that contain less than 140mg of sodium per

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serving to guide your choice."

Typically, any food in a can, package or box will contain a significant amount of sodium.

To reduce your sodium intake, include whole

Rather than buying canned beans, purchase dried beans and cook them yourself. If you do buy canned beans and vegetables, choose the low or no sodium added options.

foods rather than processed foods into your diet. To add flavor, use herbs and spices that do not contain salt.

Be sure to look at the food label of spice "blends," as these often will contain large amounts of sodium.

Fresh fruits and vegetables also add a great deal of natural flavor to a dish. When cooking poultry or fish, opt for skinless versions.

Rather than buying canned beans, purchase dried beans and cook them yourself. If you do buy canned beans and vegetables, choose the low or no sodium added options.

Become aware of other food items that can potentially derail your attempts to consume less sodium. Everyday condiments and sauces such as ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise, soy, steak, and barbecue all contain sodium. Additionally, cheeses, pickles and olives contain high levels of sodium that can add up quickly. To keep your heart healthy, be mindful of the amount of sodium you are consuming each day. Healthy adults should limit sodium intake to 2,300 mg per day.

Adults with high blood pressure should have no more than 1,500 mg per day. Those with congestive heart failure, liver cirrhosis, and kidney disease may need much lower amounts.