

# FDA Calls On Manufacturers, Restaurants to Reduce Sodium in Foods

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## Key Takeaways

- The average American gets 3,400 milligrams of sodium each day, which is higher than the recommended intake of no more than 2,300 milligrams per day.
- High sodium levels are linked to heart disease and stroke.
- The FDA is calling on food manufacturers and restaurants to voluntarily reduce sodium content in the saltiest foods, to help reduce sodium intakes nationwide.

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Diets that are high in sodium have been linked to an increased risk of having high blood pressure, which can lead to heart disease and stroke. To help reduce sodium levels, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has published guidance that includes voluntary sodium targets for the food industry with the goal of reducing sodium levels across the food supply.

"Excessive sodium intake is one of the leading causes of heart disease and may consequently worsen symptoms of congestive heart failure," says [Andrew Akhaphong](#), MS, RD, LD, a registered dietitian for Mackenthun's Fine Foods.

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## About the FDA's Recommendations

While the salt we sprinkle on food is the first sodium source that comes to mind, the truth is that most of the sodium in our diet comes from [processed, packaged, or prepared foods](#). In fact, more than 70% of sodium intake comes from sodium added during food manufacturing and commercial food preparation.

As a result, the FDA's document focuses on the sodium content in 163 subcategories of foods, so it has a wide scope. Everything from bread to chips to deli meat is on the list. Each food has a different sodium target for manufacturers to aim for.

Commonly consumed foods such as sandwiches, pizza, tacos, and [burgers](#) are also on the list. It is not just single-ingredient foods that are the focus.



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— ANDREW AKHAPHONG, MS, R

The average American currently consumes about 3,400 milligrams of [sodium](#) per day, which is 50% more than the recommended upper intake of just 2,300 milligrams per day. If the FDA targets are achieved and sodium is reduced across the food supply, it will reduce the average daily sodium intake by about 12%—from approximately 3,400 milligrams to 3,000 milligrams.

This sodium reduction strategy has the potential to prevent hundreds of thousands of premature deaths and illnesses in the coming years, according to the FDA.

"I think this is definitely a step in the right direction," says Megan Byrd, RD, a dietitian, and owner of [The Oregon Dietitian](#). "Bringing sodium down by 400 milligrams a day can still make an impact on our nation's health without making too drastic of a change."

Byrd explains that the FDA is trying to meet people where they are instead of completely cutting down the sodium all at once.

"If the FDA were to slash the sodium content of everything, foods that people are used to eating would taste much different and there would be a lot of upset," says Byrd. "By reducing sodium gradually, the FDA will be able to make a change without completely changing the taste of foods, making it more widely accepted."

**Related:** [Hidden Sources of Sodium and How to Reduce Your Overall Intake](#)

## How Sodium Reduction Will Happen

The FDA guidance is voluntary, which means that food manufacturers and restaurants do not have to comply. But, the FDA is watching. They will continue to monitor the sodium content of the food supply and will evaluate progress toward achieving the targets over the next 2.5 years.



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— VICKI SHANTA RETELNY

The FDA says that based on the results of this monitoring, they will issue subsequent targets in the next few years. The goal is to create a slow and gradual process to reduce sodium intake over the long term. Will food manufacturers and [restaurants](#) comply with this voluntary guidance? Only time will tell.

"Since sodium reduction in products can be perceived by consumers as affecting taste quality, manufacturers and restaurants may be trepidatious to heed the new FDA guidelines," says Vicki Shanta Retelny, RDN, a registered dietitian nutritionist, speaker, and creator of [Nourishing Notes](#) podcast.

Plus, with these being voluntary regulations for sodium reduction, Shanta Retelny indicates some concern that food manufacturers and restaurants may not take them as seriously or overlook them. Still, it is important for manufacturers to meet the health needs of their consumers.

Akhaphong points to a study that found that 75-82% of consumers are very concerned about the relationship between sodium and health, and 33-48% said they are trying to reduce their sodium intake.

"Though this study was published 4 years ago, it may predict the trend that consumers will continue to seek out low sodium options as more people are being proactive about their health," says Akhaphong.

## How To Reduce Sodium Intake

The FDA timeline for this initial sodium reduction is 2.5 years, and it is voluntary. If you want to take steps to reduce your sodium intake in the meantime, here are some suggestions. First, remember that you're not trying to cut sodium out completely; you just need to reduce it.

"Sodium is a necessary mineral and [electrolyte](#) in the diet and is needed for fluid balance in the body, as well as to maintain the function of muscle and nerve cells," says Shanta Retelny.

Plus, sodium is also useful as a [preservative](#) to protect foods from spoilage and to prevent bacterial growth. If you want to reduce your overall sodium intake, your best bet is to cut back on processed and packaged food. Then, learn to read food labels so you can choose options with less salt. Start by looking at the % Daily Value (%DV) for sodium.

"My rule of thumb is anything more than 20% per serving is considered a high source of sodium, while anything less than 5% serving is considered a low source," says Akhaphong.

And [simply switching salts](#) will not help. Instead, try adding flavor to foods with herbs, spices, and citrus rather than salty condiments and dressings.

"Many people believe switching from table salt to sea salt or [pink Himalayan salt](#) will reduce sodium consumption," says Akhaphong. "However, there is not a big significant difference in the sodium content between the salts besides flavor profile."

### What This Means For You

The sodium reduction strategy won't be noticed by most consumers, because the changes will be slow and gradual. Your food likely will not taste different! But over time, the collective sodium intake of all Americans will be reduced, because there will be less salt in packaged and prepared foods. If you want to take steps now to reduce your sodium intake, talk to a registered dietitian for assistance.

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1. Food and Drug Administration. [Guidance for industry on voluntary sodium reduction goals](#). Updated October 2021.
2. Food and Drug Administration. [Sodium reduction](#). Updated October 13, 2021.
3. U.S. Food & Drug Administration. [Sodium in your diet](#). Updated June 8, 2021.
4. Jefferson K, Semnani-Azad Z, Wong C, L'Abbé MR, Arcand J. [Changing sodium knowledge, attitudes and intended behaviours using web-based dietary assessment tools: A proof-of-concept study](#). *Nutrients*. 2019;11(9):2186. Published 2019 Sep 11. doi:10.3390/nu11092186