

Cut the Salt & Up Your Life Expectancy

We all know we should cut our salt, but how much and why? Reducing salt in the American diet by as little as one-half teaspoon per day could prevent nearly 100,000 heart attacks annually according to a [new study](#) by a team from the University of California, San Francisco, Stanford University Medical Center and Columbia University Medical Center. Think of the benefits as on par with the benefits from reductions in smoking. This could save the United States about \$24 billion in healthcare costs.

“A very modest decrease in the amount of salt, hardly detectable in the taste of food, can have dramatic health benefits for the U.S.,” said Kirsten Bibbins-Domingo, PhD, MD, lead author of the study co-director of the UCSF Center for Vulnerable Populations at San Francisco General Hospital. She continues, “For every dollar spent in regulating salt, anywhere from 7 to 76 healthcare dollars could be saved.”

New York Mayor’s Michael Bloomberg, has taken the warnings to “heart”, and now the man that used to salt his own pizza, is attempting to coax New Yorker’s to [extend their lives by cutting their salt](#). On Monday, January 11, 2010, the city set guidelines recommending the maximum amount of salt for a variety of restaurant and store-bought foods. The goal is to cut salt levels one-fourth the current levels over a period of five years. Unlike New York City’s mandatory trans fat ban and calorie count posting rule, the salt initiative is voluntary.

New York City Salt Reduction Initiative (5-year Voluntary Plan)

Popcorn 30%	Peanut butter 20%	Canned vegetables 40%
Breakfast Cereals 40%	Flavored snack chips 40%	Hot dogs 20%
Cold cuts 25%	Processed cheese 25%	Salsa 25%

The American Heart Association reports that salt consumption among Americans has risen by 50 percent and blood pressure has risen by nearly the same amount since the 1970s - despite evidence linking salt intake to high blood pressure and heart disease. Reducing salt intake can also reduce complications associated with diabetes, obesity, and kidney disease. Perhaps it’s time that Americans across the board accept similar challenges to New York City’s Initiative to reduce salt.

It’s clear that we need to lower salt intake, but individuals find it hard to make substantial cuts because most salt comes from processed foods, not from the salt shaker. That is why it is the food industry and those who regulate it, that could contribute substantially to the health of the nation by achieving even small reductions in the amount of salt in these processed foods. Public demand can drive the manufacturing strategy, so let’s start raising our voices, “Dump the salt!” (and we don’t mean into our food!)