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## FDA Holds Hearing on Reducing Sodium Content of Processed Foods

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**Nearly all Americans eat too much salt (sodium).** In general, the more salt a person eats, the higher their blood pressure will be. Reducing salt intake is an important way to reduce the risk of high blood pressure, which may in turn also reduce the risk of heart disease, stroke, congestive heart failure, and kidney damage.

**A look at current recommendations:** Current guidelines suggest limiting sodium intake to no more than 2,300 milligrams a day, yet the average sodium intake is about twice the recommended maximum – around 4,000 mg.

**Please [don't] pass the salt:** Most salt (75%) comes from eating processed and restaurant foods, while adding salt to food while cooking or at the dinner table adds another 5 – 10%. Since 1978, the nonprofit group Center for the Science of Public Interest (CSPI) has been urging the Food and Drug Administration to recognize that it has a role in reducing sodium consumption. Finally, last week, the FDA held a public hearing on whether and how to limit or reduce the salt content of processed foods (full article available at <http://www.cspinet.org/new/200711271.html>).

### To reduce your sodium intake:

- Cook at home more and dine out less – this way you control the salt that goes into the food you're eating.
- Eat less processed foods – foods like chips, frozen pizzas and entrees, soups, and condiments such as ketchup and salad dressing can be high in sodium.
- Read food labels – the Nutrition Facts label lists mg of sodium per serving, as well as a percent Daily Value (%DV). 5% is low and 20% is high – and you don't want to exceed a total of 100% DV for sodium from all foods in a day.
- Consume adequate amounts of potassium-rich foods. Why? Sodium **and** potassium both impact blood pressure. A diet rich in potassium helps to counterbalance some of sodium's harmful effects on blood pressure.

**Iodized salt:** Although as a population we tend to consume sodium in excess, most of it comes from processed or restaurant foods – which for the most part contain regular salt, not iodized. Until about five years ago, Americans who consumed dairy, bread or meat in their diets got plenty of iodine because machines used in production were cleaned with an iodine disinfecting solution – so some iodine ended up in dairy, bread and meat products. But companies have stopped using iodine disinfectant, so when purchasing salt to use at home it's important to select iodized salt.

- Deficiencies in this mineral are especially problematic for pregnant women and infants as iodine is essential in brain development. Iodine deficiency during infancy can result in abnormal brain development and impaired intellectual development (for more information on iodized salt look up <http://www.webmd.com/a-to-z-guides/features/salt-dont-ban-entirely>).



*Root vegetables like carrots and sweet potatoes, as well as other potassium-containing foods such as bananas and vine fruits, leafy greens, and citrus fruits can help to counteract sodium's harmful ef-*

**The American Medical Association says that 150,000 lives could be saved in the U.S. annually if salt in processed foods and restaurant foods were cut in half.**