



American Heart Association®

Hard Hats with Heart™



Toolbox  
Talks

Get the Scoop on Sodium & Salt

## How does sodium affect your health?

Sodium is a mineral that's essential for life. It's regulated by your kidneys, and it helps control your body's fluid balance. It also helps send nerve impulses and affects muscle function.

## How does sodium affect my heart?

When there's extra sodium in your bloodstream, it pulls water into your blood vessels, increasing the total amount (volume) of blood inside them. With more blood flowing through your blood vessels, blood pressure increases. It's like turning up the water supply to a garden hose — the pressure in the hose increases as more water is blasted through it.

Over time, high blood pressure may overstretch or injure the blood vessel walls and speed the build-up of gunky plaque that can block blood flow. The added pressure tires out the heart by forcing it to work harder to pump blood through the body. And the extra water in your body can lead to bloating and weight gain.

## What are the benefits of cutting down on sodium?

Eating less sodium can reduce your risk for high blood pressure and bloating, and stave off other effects of too much salt. And did you know that reducing sodium in the food supply could save money and lives?

One estimate suggested that if Americans moved to an average intake of 1,500 mg/day sodium, it could result in a 25.6 percent overall decrease in blood pressure and an estimated \$26.2 billion in health care savings.

Another estimate projected that achieving this goal would reduce deaths from cardiovascular disease by anywhere from 500,000 to nearly 1.2 million over the next 10 years.

### Frequently Asked Questions:

#### **Is sodium really that bad? I've seen research that questions it.**

The science behind sodium reduction is clear. Significant evidence links excess sodium intake with high blood pressure, which increases the risk of heart attack, stroke and heart failure.

### Discussion Questions:

- How often do you add salt to your food?
- What are other ways to season your food?