

Chow Line

News from the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences

Sodium still a concern with pricey types of salt

My wife recently bought some pink Himalayan salt. Besides being pretty, it's expensive and isn't even iodized. Is it somehow healthier?

Different types of salt might provide distinct flavors. Some chefs and others with refined palates swear by one type or another. Others, though, really can't tell a difference.

As far as nutrition goes, your instincts are correct. All salt contains sodium, which is the nutrient of concern when it comes to salt. Americans average about 3,400 milligrams of sodium a day, but the recommended level is 2,300 milligrams, or even less — 1,500 milligrams a day for people over 50, African Americans, or anyone with high blood pressure, diabetes or chronic kidney disease.

The body needs a modest amount of sodium, but 9 in 10 Americans go way overboard, contributing to high blood pressure, heart disease, kidney stones, osteoporosis and even headaches. In fact, according to a 2010 study in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, if everyone reduced their sodium intake to recommended amounts, up to 66,000 strokes and 99,000 heart attacks could be prevented annually.

Different kinds of salt might provide varying amounts of sodium, but the levels between them are negligible. It's important to know, too, that the vast majority of sodium consumed in the American diet comes from highly processed foods. A cup of soup contains up to 940 milligrams of sodium. One slice of bologna has almost 300 milligrams. A slice of bread may have up to 230 milligrams.

That's one reason it's so important to read Nutrition Facts labels and examine them for sodium content, or purchase foods with "sodium-free" or "very low sodium" on the label.



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You should also be aware that the salt used in processed foods is rarely, if ever, iodized. In the U.S., iodine started to be added to table salt in 1924 to reduce the risk of goiter, which is an enlarged thyroid gland resulting from iodine deficiency. Adults need about 150 micrograms of iodine a day, and most of it comes naturally from foods: fish, including cod, tuna, shrimp and other types of seafood; dairy products; and breads and cereals. Fruits and vegetables also provide varying amounts of iodine, depending on how much is in the soil where they're grown. So, with a healthful, balanced diet, it's likely you don't need the iodine — much less the sodium — delivered from the saltshaker. A quarter-teaspoon of iodized salt provides 95 micrograms of iodine and nearly 600 milligrams of sodium.

To reduce sodium, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends:

- Buy fresh, frozen (no sauce) or no salt added canned vegetables.
- Use fresh poultry, fish, pork and lean meat rather than canned or processed meats. Check to see if saline or salt solution has been added — if so, choose another brand.
- Limit your use of sauces, mixes and "instant" products, including flavored rice and ready-made pasta.

For more details, see cdc.gov/salt.

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