Excessive sodium in our diet can increase our blood pressure, especially in salt-sensitive individuals. High blood pressure, or hypertension, is a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease. Heart disease and stroke are the first and fourth leading causes of death in the U.S., making cardiovascular disease responsible for one of every three deaths in the country.

Americans suffer more than 2 million heart attacks and strokes each year, and every day, 2,200 people die from cardiovascular disease. Reducing sodium in our diets is an important way to lower our risk.

Hypertension, or high blood pressure, is elevated pressure or force that circulating blood exerts on the artery wall. Uncontrolled hypertension can damage the interior wall of blood vessels, which can lead to several serious health conditions.

Americans consume an average of 3,000 to 3,600 milligrams (mg) of sodium a day, more than twice as much as the American Heart Association recommends.

Q: Why should I be concerned about my sodium intake?
When we eat too much sodium, our body retains more water to maintain the proper fluid balance, resulting in high blood pressure, or hypertension. Hypertension puts an extra burden on your heart and blood vessels, which can cause damage throughout the body. Also, excessive sodium can increase loss of bone calcium, which puts us at a higher risk for osteoporosis. Reducing the amount of sodium in your diet may help you lower your risk for high blood pressure and osteoporosis.

Q: How much sodium should I have each day?
The American Heart Association recommends 1,500 mg for the general population. This works out to be about 2/3 teaspoon of salt.

Q: How does high blood pressure affect my long-term health?
Because blood vessels are throughout the body, uncontrolled high blood pressure can cause a variety of problems in many locations. The increased pressure of blood flowing through your arteries can cause narrowing and damage to the inner lining of the vessel wall, resulting in hardening of the arteries. Fats from your diet enter your bloodstream, pass through the damaged cells and collect to start plaque buildup.

Through time, the increased pressure can cause aneurysms, which are weak spots in vessels that can
bulge and sometimes rupture. The heart, which has
to work harder when blood pressure is high, also is
affected. It can become damaged and weak, which
eventually can lead to heart failure.

Damage to the arteries in the brain can deprive the
brain of oxygen, which can cause a stroke. High
blood pressure is one of the most common causes
of kidney failure. It can damage the large arteries
leading to your kidneys and the tiny blood vessels in
the kidneys.

**Q: Will I have to sacrifice flavor to
reduce the sodium in my diet?**

Like many things in life, salt is an acquired taste. We
build up a tolerance for it and we “expect” it in the
foods we eat. If you gradually reduce the sodium in
your diet, you’ll slowly adjust to the less salty flavor.
Experimenting with new recipes that rely on herbs
and spices instead of salt to enhance the flavor of the
meals can be a great way to enjoy your food without
the negative health effects of sodium.

**Q: What are the common sources of sodium?**

Americans consume 75 percent of their sodium
from processed foods, not from table salt. Read
the labels when you buy prepared and packaged
foods and watch for the words “soda” (referring to
sodium bicarbonate, or baking soda) and “sodium”
and the symbol “Na.” These products contain sodium
compounds. Sea salt and kosher salt also
are forms of sodium chloride.

**Q: How do I reduce sodium in my diet?**

One way to reduce sodium is to eat foods that
are naturally low in sodium, such as fruits and
vegetables. Limit processed foods such as ham
or frozen dinners and restaurant-prepared foods.
Prepare homemade meals because you have the
most control of how much sodium gets added. When
you are in a grocery store, opt for “low in sodium” or
“reduced sodium” products.

For more information, visit these websites:

**NDSU Extension Service**
www.ndsu.edu/edsmart
www.ag.ndsu.edu/publications
(Enter “sodium” into the search function)

**American Heart Association**
www.heart.org/sodium

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**
www.cdc.gov/salt

To learn more about sodium, visit this online
learning module: www.ag.ndsu.edu/millionhearts

**Nutrition Facts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serving Size 1 cup (228g)</th>
<th>Servings Per Container 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Amount Per Serving</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calories 250</td>
<td>Calories from Fat 110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Daily Value*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Fat 12g</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturated Fat 3g</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trans Fat 3g</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cholesterol 30mg</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sodium 470mg</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Carbohydrate 31g</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dietary Fiber 0g</td>
<td>0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sugars 5g</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protein 5g</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin A 4%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin C 2%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calcium 20%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your Daily Values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.

Calories: 2,000 2,500
Total Fat Less than 65g 80g
Sat Fat Less than 20g 25g
Cholesterol Less than 300mg 300mg
Sodium Less than 2,400mg 2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate  300g 375g
Dietary Fiber 25g 30g

Read Nutrition Facts labels and note the
milligrams of sodium per
serving and the “percent
daily value.” For example,
if the food has 52 percent
of the daily value,
you have consumed
more than half of your daily
sodium recom-

**How much sodium would be in 2 cups
of this food?**

(940mg or 40 percent of the daily value)

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