

Sodium and potassium

Sodium and potassium are minerals your body needs to work normally. The levels of sodium and potassium in your body are controlled by your kidneys. Sodium is a mineral that helps your body maintain blood volume, controls the balance of water in your body's cells and keeps your nerves working.

Why is extra salt bad for me?

Most Americans eat too much salt. Salt is about 40% sodium and even though the body needs a certain amount of sodium to work normally; extra sodium can be harmful to your health. When you eat too much salt the body holds on to extra water. This extra water raises your blood pressure and puts strain on your kidneys, arteries, heart and brain. Higher blood pressure can damage blood vessels leading to a higher risk for heart disease, stroke, congestive heart failure, and kidney damage.

How can I lower the amount of sodium (salt) in my diet?

There are many changes you can make to lower the amount of salt you eat.

- Eat fewer processed foods (soups, canned foods, frozen meals)
- Use less salt while cooking. Try herbs and spices instead
- Do not add extra salt to food while eating
- Compare the labels of similar foods while shopping and buy the food with the least amount of sodium
- Eat unsalted nuts, beans, and lentils
- Use unsalted or low-sodium broths, bouillons and soups

At first, it may take a little while to get used to the change in the taste of food. However, with time you will learn to like the natural taste of your food and you will not miss the extra salt at all!

What does Potassium do for my health?

Potassium is a mineral your body needs for healthy nerve function, muscle control, and blood pressure control. Your body uses potassium to balance some of the effects of sodium on your blood pressure. Some people, especially those with kidney disorders, need to be careful about how much potassium they get. Foods with higher amounts of potassium include:

- Sweet potatoes
- Leafy greens (beet greens and spinach)
- Root vegetables (potatoes and carrots)
- Bananas
- Citrus fruits (oranges and grapefruit)

Ask your health care provider how much sodium and potassium is healthy for you.

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