



## Cooperative Extension Service

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### Salt

Recent reports by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) are highlighting a growing problem in the United States: we are eating too much salt. If this sounds somewhat familiar to you then pat yourself on the back—it's not exactly a new problem. We've known for over 30 years of the dangers of too much salt in the diet, but over those same 30 years salt consumption has risen dramatically.

Where exactly are we getting all of this salt? Well, the vast majority of the salt in our diets comes from prepared meals and processed foods. This includes many restaurant items, as well as popular foods at the grocery store like frozen dinners and many of the foods that come in a can or a box. Next time you're shopping take a quick peek at the sodium (salt) amounts on some of the processed foods—you may be surprised by what you see!

While salt is necessary for proper health, research shows that high levels of salt in the diet are associated with high blood pressure, heart disease, and stroke. Our dietary guidelines recommend taking in 1500mg of sodium per day, while most Americans consume over twice that amount!

While some food companies are pledging to voluntarily cut back on salt in their foods the action is coming slowly as they scramble to maintain product consistency.

So what's the fix?

Well, instead of waiting on the industry to take responsibility and the FDA to take action we can take matters into our own hands. Reducing sodium in the diet is quite simple, actually, and relies on many principles of healthful eating that you're probably already familiar with:

1. Make your own food!
2. Take the salt shaker off the table, and use only if necessary.
3. Increase the amounts of fresh foods, especially fruits and vegetables, in your diet.
4. If you must get processed and prepared foods then look for the low-sodium versions.
5. Use herbs and spices to add flavor to foods.

While cutting salt from your diet may be difficult at first, research shows that your taste buds will soon adjust, and you will soon be tasting all of those great flavors behind the salt! And you will not only be doing yourself a favor, but the economy as well—the IOM report estimates that nation-wide reductions in salt intake could prevent more than 100,000 deaths annually, and save billions in health care costs. For more helpful information on how to reduce salt in your diet take a look at the UW Extension handout *Add Some Spice to Your Life!* You can find it on our website at:

<http://www.sheridancounty.com/info/coop/fcs.php>. *Kentz Willis, M.S., is the University Extension Educator in Nutrition and Food Safety for Northeast Wyoming. He can be reached via email at [kwillis3@uwyo.edu](mailto:kwillis3@uwyo.edu).*