Salt and Sodium

Salt, also known as sodium chloride, is about 40% sodium and 60% chloride. It flavors food and is used as a binder and stabilizer. It is also a food preservative, as bacteria can't thrive in the presence of a high amount of salt. The human body requires a small amount of sodium to conduct nerve impulses, contract and relax muscles, and maintain the proper balance of water and minerals. It is estimated that we need about 500 mg of sodium daily for these vital functions. But too much sodium in the diet can lead to high blood pressure, heart disease, and stroke. It can also cause calcium losses, some of which may be pulled from bone. Most Americans consume at least 1.5 teaspoons of salt per day, or about 3400 mg of sodium, which contains far more than our bodies need.

Recommended Intake level

The U.S. Dietary Reference Intakes state that there is not enough evidence to establish a Recommended Dietary Allowance or a toxic level for sodium (aside from chronic disease risk). Because of this, a Tolerable Upper intake Level (UL) has not been established; a UL is the maximum daily intake unlikely to cause harmful effects on health.

Guidelines for Adequate Intakes (AI) of sodium were established based on the lowest levels of sodium intake used in randomized controlled trials that did not show a deficiency but that also allowed for an adequate intake of nutritious foods naturally containing sodium. For men and women 14 years of age and older and pregnant women, the AI is 1,500 milligrams a day.

A Chronic Disease Risk Reduction (CDRR) Intake has also been established, based on the evidence of benefit of a reduced sodium intake on the risk of cardiovascular disease and high blood pressure. Reducing sodium intakes below the CDRR is expected to lower the risk of chronic disease in the general healthy population. The CDRR lists 2,300 milligrams a day as the maximum amount to consume for chronic disease reduction for men and women 14 years of age and older and pregnant women. Most people in the U.S. consume more sodium than the AI or CDRR guidelines.

Source: https://nutritionsource.hsph.harvard.edu/salt-and-sodium/