

## Shake off your salt habit

Sodium is an essential nutrient needed by the body in relatively small quantities. Virtually all Americans take in more than they need, about 3,400 milligrams (mg) per day on average, consumed mostly as salt. Only a small proportion of total intake comes from salt used at the table or in cooking; most salt is added during food processing. Some foods are high in sodium, but a lot of sodium comes from eating large quantities of foods with lower amounts of sodium such as yeast breads.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend that adults reduce daily sodium intake to less than 2,300 mg. Persons age 51 and older and those of any age who are African American or have high blood pressure, diabetes, or chronic kidney disease, should reduce their intake to 1,500 mg per day.

If you watch health news you may have seen recent conflicting reports about sodium and health. First, an analysis of several clinical trials found that reducing sodium does not lower the risk of dying from heart disease or any other cause. The authors later clarified their report, saying reduction of salt is good for your health but by itself is insufficient. Not long afterward, a

large population-based study from the CDC found that high sodium intake was associated with increased death rates from all causes. Most experts including the American Heart Association are continuing to recommend that people cut back on sodium.

You can reduce sodium intake in several ways:

- Read the Nutrition Facts label and buy foods that are low in sodium.
- Eat more fresh foods and fewer processed foods that are high in sodium.
- Eat more home-prepared foods, so that you have more control over sodium, and use little or no salt in cooking or eating foods.
- When eating out, ask that salt not be added to your food or order lower sodium options.
- Reducing your overall calorie intake is likely to reduce your salt consumption; in general, the more foods and beverages people consume the more sodium they get.

-- from *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010*, [dietaryguidelines.gov](http://dietaryguidelines.gov), and *Tufts University Health & Nutrition Letter*, October 2011.

### Recipe of the Week: Winter Squash and Sweet Pepper Salad

adapted from Jane Brody's Good Food Gourmet serves 6

1 lb. butternut squash, peeled, halved lengthwise and sliced crosswise 1/8" thick  
1 large green pepper, sliced lengthwise in 1/4" strips  
1 large red pepper, sliced lengthwise in 1/4" strips  
3 Tbsp. chopped roasted unsalted peanuts

#### Dressing:

5 Tbsp. orange juice  
1/4 cup fresh lemon juice  
2 Tbsp. minced onion  
1/4 cup minced fresh mint leaves  
1 teaspoon ground cumin  
1 Tbsp. sugar  
fresh ground pepper

1. Steam squash slices over boiling water for 4 minutes or till barely tender. Set aside to cool.
2. Put squash and peppers in large bowl.
3. Combine dressing ingredients in blender.
4. Pour over vegetables and toss gently. Try to avoid tearing the squash.
5. Sprinkle dressed salad with peanuts. Serve at room temperature. Transfer to a platter if you like.

#### Nutrition information:

Calories: 88      Total Fat: 2.5g      Saturated Fat: 0.3g  
Sodium: 5mg      Carbohydrates: 17g  
Dietary Fiber: 3.5g      Protein: 2.4g

**Tip of the Week:** Don't pick up germs at the gym! • Cover any cuts with a bandaid. • Wash your hands before and after using the equipment. Carry a small bottle of hand sanitizer with your towel. • Don't use the same towel to wipe your face that you use for wiping machines. • Bring your own mat for floor exercises and clean it regularly. • Sit on a towel in the steam room. • Shower with antibacterial soap and put on clean clothes immediately after your workout. • Don't walk around barefoot, but do take off your flip flops in the shower and wash your feet. • Don't share towels, razors, bar soap, or water bottles.

-- from *The Boston Globe and nytimes.com*