Dear Alice,

If you do not have salt-sensitive hypertension, do you need to worry about salt consumption levels? If so, what would be safe daily amounts?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Since high blood pressure is a major risk factor for heart disease and stroke, decreasing salt (sodium) consumption can greatly contribute to enhanced health for everyone? Even if you don?t currently have salt-sensitive hypertension. Paying attention to your daily salt intake now can help you prevent high blood pressure in the future. Overconsumption of salt has been linked to an increased risk of osteoporosis, particularly in women. Regardless of how much calcium is in your diet, researchers have found that a high sodium intake can lead to calcium loss (excreted out in urine).

While increased salt consumption can lead to greater health risks, it?s important to know that everyone needs a small amount of salt to keep their bodies working properly. After all, salt helps regulate blood pressure, transmit nerve impulses, and coordinate the contraction and relaxation of muscles. Current Dietary Guidelines for Americans[2] recommend a maximum of 2,300 mg of sodium per day, but notes that people who have high blood pressure or are likely to develop high blood pressure, should not consume more than 1,500 mg per day. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that nearly 70 percent of U.S. adults should limit sodium intake to 1,500 mg per day.

It?s very easy to go above the daily recommended amount of salt without paying attention. About one teaspoon of salt equals 2,300 mg per day. While Americans are thought to be heavy-handed with the salt shaker, the truth is that the majority of salt in our diets comes from processed foods or eating out. Foods like cold cuts, pizza, soups, cheese, fast foods, and snacks like chips, pretzels, and popcorn, all have high amounts of salt. In addition to processed foods, sodium also hides in some natural products like vegetables, dairy products, shellfish, and a wide variety of foods that don?t typically taste salty. For example, one cup of low-fat milk has about 107 mg of sodium, while a slice of whole-wheat bread contains 132 mg.

For more ideas on how to reduce salt intake and make healthier eating choices, check out the Go Ask Alice!
If you are still concerned about the amount of salt you should include in your diet, you may want to consider speaking to your primary care provider or a nutritionist.