

How Much Sodium & Sugar Is Good Per Serving?

Sodium and sugar are two food additives that, when eaten to excess, can increase your risk of heart disease and may contribute to gain weight. You know you should reduce your intake of both of these food components, but what that requires within the context of meal planning can be confusing. If you have doubts about your diet and nutrient intake, consult a registered dietitian or medical professional to help you craft a menu plan appropriate for your needs.



Too much sodium in your diet contributes to high blood pressure and may increase your risk for heart disease. The American Heart Association reports that if Americans reduced their sodium intake by a little more than half, it could save \$26 billion in healthcare costs and decrease incidences of high blood pressure by 26 percent. Too much sodium can also cause water retention and bloating in some people.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture recommends you consume no more than 2,300 milligrams of sodium daily. If you are 51 years or older, of African American descent or have high blood pressure, diabetes or chronic kidney disease, you should limit yourself to just 1,500 milligrams per day. Divide the recommendation appropriate to you by the number of times you sit down to eat daily, including snacks, to come up with an approximation of how much sodium per serving would be good for you. For example, if you aim to consume 2,300 milligrams of sodium daily over the course of three meals and two snacks – you should consume no more than 460 milligrams per sitting. If you eat a little less at one meal compensate by eating a little more at another.

Sugar Concerns

Naturally-occurring sugar, found in fruits, some vegetables and dairy products, come with an entire nutritional package that offers vitamins, minerals, protein and antioxidants. While you never want to overdose on any certain food at the expense of others, your intake of naturally-occurring sugars is not a paramount health concern. Foods with added sugars, found in processed foods, soda, candy and baked goods, usually come with fewer nutrients and a greater number of calories. Too much added sugar causes weight gain, may contribute to high blood pressure and increases your risk for metabolic syndrome – a precursor to Type 2 diabetes. Choosing foods with added sugar in lieu of healthier whole, natural foods can also cause nutritional shortfalls.

Sugar Recommendations

The Institute of Medicine recommends that added sugars comprise no more than 25 percent of total calories. For a 2,000-calorie diet, this means fewer than 200 calories of sugar per day – or 12.5 teaspoons. The U.S. Department of Agriculture Dietary Guidelines only encourages a reduction of overall added sugar intake. The American Heart Association points out that the average American consumes about 22 teaspoons of added sugar daily. The Heart Association recommends a more conservative daily intake of added sugars consisting of 6 teaspoons daily for women and 9 teaspoons daily for men. As you did with sodium, figure out roughly how much added sugar you should consume in one sitting by dividing the amount of sugar appropriate for your needs by the number of meals and snacks you eat daily. For a woman following a 2,000-calorie diet with three meals and two snacks, aim for about 1.2 teaspoons per serving – or 4.8 grams.

Considerations

Figuring out the sodium content by reading food packaging is pretty simple. Milligrams of sodium are listed as a line on all nutrition labels. Food labels do not distinguish between added and naturally-occurring sugars, however. In general, fresh fruit, starchy vegetables and plain dairy products will contain some sugar. Sweetened yogurts, fruit in syrup and canned vegetables in sauce will have significantly more sugar than their plain counterparts because of added sources. Other foods do not naturally contain much sugar, so if sugar grams appear on the label -- chances are it is added. A

quick scan of the ingredient list can also reveal added sugars. Look for ingredients such as cane sugar, high fructose corn syrup, crystalline fructose, dextrose, barley malt syrup, honey, agave or molasses.