

A bit more salt each day may not harm older adults

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But experts say restricting intake is still advisable.

(HealthDay)—Consuming a "modest" amount of salt might not harm older adults, but any more than that can damage health, a new study finds.

The study of adults aged 71 to 80 found that daily consumption of 2,300 milligrams (mg) of salt—the equivalent of a teaspoon—didn't increase deaths, [heart disease](#), stroke or heart failure over 10 years.

However, salt intake above 2,300 mg—which is higher than heart experts currently recommend—might increase the risk for early death and other ailments, researchers said.

"The rate of salt intake in our study was modest," said lead researcher

Dr. Andreas Kalogeropoulos, an assistant professor of cardiology at Emory University in Atlanta.

The findings shouldn't be considered a license to use the salt shaker indiscriminately. The researchers did not compare high salt intake with low intake.

"The question isn't whether you should have a teaspoon or two, but whether you should have a teaspoon daily or even less than that," he said.

The American Heart Association recommends less than 1,500 milligrams of salt a day, which is less than a teaspoon.

Kalogeropoulos added that the researchers saw a trend toward higher death in the few study participants who had a high salt intake.

The report was published online Jan. 19 in *JAMA Internal Medicine*.

For the study, the researchers looked at salt's effects on about 2,600 adults, aged 71 to 80, who filled out a food frequency questionnaire.

During 10 years of follow-up, 881 participants died, 572 developed heart disease or had a stroke, and 398 developed [heart failure](#), the researchers found.

When the investigators looked at deaths compared with [salt consumption](#), they found that the death rate was lowest—30.7 percent—for those who consumed 1,500 to 2,300 mg a day. Those who averaged 1,500 mg a day had a death rate of 33.8 percent. Among those whose salt intake was more than 2,300 mg a day, the death rate was 35.2 percent.

Dr. Elliot Antman, president of the American Heart Association and the associate dean for clinical and translational research at Harvard Medical

School, said these findings are consistent with the findings of other studies showing that as salt intake increases so does the risk of death, [heart](#) disease and stroke.

"There is only one firm conclusion from this study, and only in the elderly, that increasing [salt intake](#) dramatically increases the risk," he said.

Salt is linked to [blood pressure](#), and the more salt people consume, the higher their blood pressure, Antman said. "A good way to lower your blood pressure is to eat a low-salt diet," he said.

Antman added that three-quarters of the salt Americans consume comes from processed and restaurant food, not from the salt shaker on the table.

"The average American takes in 3,400 milligrams of salt a day," Antman said. "Consumers need to read nutrition labels when they shop and ask restaurants to provide the nutrition contents of their meals. They should choose lower-salt products in the supermarket and select lower-salt options on the menu," he said.

James DiNicolantonio, a cardiovascular research scientist at Saint Luke's Mid America Heart Institute in Kansas City, Mo., agreed.

"Switch from highly processed foods—which are high in salt and added sugars, as well as other substances—to eating whole real foods," he said. "If you decide to sprinkle some salt on whole food, this should not be an issue, just avoid sprinkling the sugar."

Dr. Sean Lucan, from the department of family and social medicine at Montefiore Medical Center/Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York City, said that people should look at the big picture and not focus

on [salt](#) or any other single dietary component.

"We should be focusing on overall diet and lifestyle. Choose real foods derived from plants—the living botanical kind as opposed to the industrial processing kind—and you should do fine," Lucan said.

More information: For more on salt, visit the [American Heart Association](#).

Kalogeropoulos AP, Georgiopoulou VV, Murphy RA, et al. Dietary Sodium Content, Mortality, and Risk for Cardiovascular Events in Older Adults: The Health, Aging, and Body Composition (Health ABC) Study. *JAMA Intern Med*. Published online January 19, 2015. doi:10.1001/jamainternmed.2014.6278.

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