

How much sodium are you eating? New online salt calculator sums it up

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The new online salt calculator developed takes less than five minutes to complete. Credit: Bigstock

Canadians can track how much salt they're eating and identify the main sources of sodium in their diet using a new online Salt Calculator.

"Many Canadians think the biggest source of salt in their diet comes from a salt shaker, but that's not the case - it's the hidden sodium added during food production that's the biggest culprit," says Joanne Arcand, a [Postdoctoral Fellow](#) in the Department of Nutritional Sciences at U of T, who helped develop the calculator.

The tool, developed by researchers at the University of Toronto, the Ottawa Hospital Research Institute (OHRI), and the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences (ICES), is among the first of its kind in North America.

On average, Canadians consume approximately 3,400 mg of sodium per day, which is more than two times the recommended amount. Too much sodium can lead to [high blood pressure](#) and is a major risk factor for stroke, heart disease and [kidney disease](#). High sodium intake has also been

linked to an increased risk of osteoporosis, [stomach cancer](#) and severity of asthma.

"Enabling people to monitor their sodium intake has [personal benefits](#) – like [lowering blood pressure](#) and risk of heart disease – but it can also dramatically reduce overall [health care costs](#)," said Arcand.

The Salt Calculator – located online at www.projectbiglife.ca – contains 23 questions and takes less than five minutes to complete. It was developed by analyzing the sodium levels of more than 20,000 grocery and restaurant foods, and is based on Canadian eating patterns and the most up-to-date data on sodium levels.

The calculator asks questions such as:

- How often do you eat out?
- Where do you eat out (fast food, table service or fine dining establishments)?
- How often and how much do you eat per day, week or month?
- What types of food do you eat (breads, prepackaged food, cheese etc.)?

"We know that Canadians are eating too much salt. But the calculator helps zero in on the exact sources in their diet that are responsible," says Professor Mary L'Abbé, Chair of the Department of Nutritional Sciences. "Armed with this information, people can change their eating habits and re-evaluate using the calculator over time."

Bread products, processed meats, soups and canned/pickled vegetables contribute the most sodium to the Canadian diet.

"I don't know my patient's sodium consumption level and my patients don't know their levels. Even patients with hypertension and heart disease don't know their [sodium levels](#)," says Doug Manuel, a

primary care doctor and scientist at ICES and OHRI.
"Because of that information gap, I prescribe drugs more than lifestyle change. More importantly, how can we have informed public policy when individual Canadians don't know how much sodium they consume?"

Sodium Awareness Week runs March 11–17.

Provided by University of Toronto

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