Another Slice of... Sodium?
By Jillian Saffie

It’s finally that time again...Friday night, the start of the weekend. You plan to go out with some friends and have one of the best nights you’ve ever had in your life. After all, you deserve it don’t you? It’s been a long hard week and you’ve managed to get all of your work done so what’s a few drinks with a few friends at the bar? When you’ve had enough of the scene you head out and realize that you are starving. You head back to your apartment with your buddies and decide to order a pizza. When it arrives, you scarf down three pieces without even knowing it. All of a sudden you’re so thirsty so you gulp down cup after cup of water and now, well now you have a stomachache. You then wonder why you drank so fast to make your stomach upset. You really have no idea how to explain it, you were just thirsty. Well the truth is, all of the sodium in that pizza that you ravenously shoved down was what was making you thirsty and now, not only do you have an upset stomach, but you also have an increased risk of high blood pressure which, if gone untreated, can lead to heart disease.

The Bad News about Salt

Sodium or salt is considered to be a silent killer because too much salt in a person’s diet can lead to many different complications such as high blood pressure, strokes, heart disease, and kidney disease. It is recommended by the 2010 Dietary Guidelines to only consume about or less than 2300 milligrams of sodium daily. This number, however, does not apply to everyone. Adults over age 51 or those who have kidney disease, diabetes, and high blood pressure should reduce their intake even more to about 1500 milligrams of salt daily. This same goal applies to young children as well.

It is very important to try to stay within these guidelines because they are designed for our safety. Right now, America isn’t doing a great job of sticking to these “rules.” We, as a nation eat more than double the recommended amount of salt daily. This is risky because too much salt is dangerous for our bodies and can cause those complications described above. However, on the brighter side, research has shown that decreasing sodium intakes also causes a decrease in high blood pressure in both adults and children.
So What Types of Foods Contain Salt?

Unfortunately, almost every food contains at least a little bit of salt. Some of the biggest offenders however include processed foods, quick breads, pizza, chips, pasta dishes, and deli meats. You may not even realize the amount of salt that goes into certain dishes. Let’s take pasta for example. After the water boils, salt is usually added. Then we use tomato or marinara sauce, which again contains salt especially if it’s from a jar, to go with our pasta. And of course, we can’t have pasta without meatballs. Whether meatballs are homemade or store bought they most likely contain a good amount of salt. But wait, that’s not all. Most of us top off our pasta dishes with heaping spoonfuls of cheese. Cheese is also considered on the list of the biggest offenders of sodium. So once you are all done eating a nice pasta dish, you’ve already consumed a pretty big amount of salt. Other foods that contain a smaller amount of salt but should still be considered are certain types of salad dressings, soups, different types of grain-based desserts, eggs, and condiments such as ketchup, relish, and soy sauce.

But I Thought that Salt was Good for You!

Well you’re not completely off the right track if you think that salt is good for you because in moderation it’s excellent for our health. For example, salt is an electrolyte which is a charged mineral in our body, specifically in our blood. Other electrolytes include potassium, calcium, chloride, magnesium, and phosphorus. If any one of these chemicals becomes imbalanced in our bodies, this imbalance can lead to muscle dysfunction and even cause us to pass out. Remember to also adjust your salt intake if you sweat a lot because sweating excretes salt through our skin. So if you’re a big athlete on campus or even just like to work out a lot, it might be a good idea to modify your sodium intake to decrease the chances of any electrolyte imbalances. Not only is salt in moderation good for our diet but it is also a great natural healer. If you have any type of wound, salt can help heal it quicker. Salt even helps to heal acne! So next time you have a cut or even a newly pierced ear, create a half salt half water solution and clean the infected area with it. The pain will be gone in no time!

Any Tips on How to Reduce my Salt Intake?

Of course! There are many different ways to help reduce your daily sodium intake. Some of these ways include...
• Learning how to read and recognize a nutrition label to see just how much salt is in a food product.
• Avoiding fast food restaurants.
• Making more meals at home so that you can easily prepare a dish using little or no salt.
• Eating more fresh foods such as fruits and vegetables.
• Avoiding processed foods.
• Watching your intake of different sports drinks such as Powerade and Gatorade.

All of these ways can definitely improve our daily sodium intake. The most important advice that I will give to you is to just be aware. We know that many foods are prepared with salt simply because it enhances the taste of foods. We also know that a college student’s diet can be designed with high levels of sodium because most convenience foods such as pizza, ramen noodles, sports drinks, and soups appeal to young people who are so busy with school work and can afford to buy these easy prep foods. Unfortunately, we young adults are just targeted with all sorts of sodium containing foods that just might take a toll on us in future years. We, as students, need to make the right decisions when it comes to our health. So maybe another slice isn’t always a great idea.