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# Controlling Sodium and Reading Labels

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Sodium is an essential nutrient required by the body in small amounts to maintain fluid balance, muscle activity, and nervous system functions. Most Americans eat far more than the recommended amount of sodium, which is less than 2,300 milligrams (mg) per day. This is equal to only 1 teaspoon of table salt! Some people with hypertension, heart failure, kidney disease, may need to further reduce their sodium intake to 1,500 to 2,000 mg per day.

Most of the sodium consumed comes from processed or packaged foods. Sodium is used as a food ingredient to cure meats, thicken foods, retain moisture, enhance flavors, and preserve foods. Smart grocery shopping techniques and using food labels can help you reduce the amount of sodium you consume.

## What foods should be in your shopping cart?

- ✓ Vegetables: fresh or frozen
- ✓ Fruit: fresh, frozen, or canned
- ✓ Whole grain breads and cereals
- ✓ Lean unprocessed meats and legumes
- ✓ Herbs, spices, and seasonings that contain no sodium or salt
- ✓ Unsalted nuts, seeds, and nut butters
- ✓ Low fat dairy foods

## Where do you find these foods in the store?

- Plan a grocery list before you go to the store.

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- Shop the outside aisles where you find the fresh produce and fresh meats.
  - You will find fresh herbs with the fresh produce.
  - Look for “no salt added” or “low sodium” foods near the regular items on the shelf.
  - Some low sodium items may be found in the “Diet Section” of the grocery store.



## What should you look for on the food label?

### 1) Start with the serving size.

Remember, if you eat more than one serving, you will get more sodium than the amount listed.

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## 2) Check sodium content.

Use food labels and packaging to help you select the lowest sodium option. If unable to buy low sodium versions, drain and rinse canned foods under running water to remove excess sodium.

- Choose foods with 140 mg sodium or less per serving.
- Avoid food with more than 300 mg of sodium per serving.

You can also use the % Daily Value (% DV) of sodium on food labels to help you quickly compare brands or products.

- Choose foods with 5% or less Daily Value sodium, these are low sodium.
- Avoid foods with 20% or higher Daily Value sodium, these are high sodium.

Product packaging can help guide you, as well.

- Salt-free or Sodium-free: less than 5 milligrams of sodium per serving.
- Very low sodium: less than 35 milligrams of sodium per serving.
- Low sodium: less than 140 milligrams of sodium per serving.

## 3) Read ingredient lists

Labels list the ingredients in order with those that weigh the most appearing first and those that weigh the least appearing last. Choose foods where sodium is listed near the end of the list. Be on the lookout for ingredients that contain sodium: saline, sodium benzoate, sodium bicarbonate (baking soda), sodium chloride (salt), sodium nitrate, and monosodium glutamate (MSG).

Regular chicken with noodles soup

| <b>Nutrition Facts</b>       |             |
|------------------------------|-------------|
| 1 serving per container      |             |
| <b>Serving size</b>          | <b>8 oz</b> |
| <b>Amount per serving</b>    |             |
| <b>Calories</b>              | <b>60</b>   |
| <b>% Daily Value*</b>        |             |
| <b>Total Fat</b> 2g          | <b>3%</b>   |
| Saturated Fat 0.5g           | <b>3%</b>   |
| <i>Trans Fat</i> 0g          |             |
| <b>Cholesterol</b> 15mg      | <b>5%</b>   |
| <b>Sodium</b> 890mg          | <b>37%</b>  |
| <b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 8g | <b>3%</b>   |
| Dietary Fiber 1g             | <b>4%</b>   |
| Total Sugars 1g              |             |
| <b>Protein</b> 3g            |             |
| Vitamin A                    | 4%          |
| Vitamin C                    | 0%          |
| Calcium                      | 0%          |
| Iron                         | 2%          |

\* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

Low-sodium chicken with noodles soup

| <b>Nutrition Facts</b>        |                 |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1 serving per container       |                 |
| <b>Serving size</b>           | <b>10.75 oz</b> |
| <b>Amount per serving</b>     |                 |
| <b>Calories</b>               | <b>160</b>      |
| <b>% Daily Value*</b>         |                 |
| <b>Total Fat</b> 4.5g         | <b>7%</b>       |
| Saturated Fat 1.5g            | <b>8%</b>       |
| <i>Trans Fat</i> 0g           |                 |
| <b>Cholesterol</b> 30mg       | <b>10%</b>      |
| <b>Sodium</b> 140mg           | <b>6%</b>       |
| <b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 17g | <b>6%</b>       |
| Dietary Fiber 2g              | <b>8%</b>       |
| Total Sugars 4g               |                 |
| <b>Protein</b> 12g            |                 |
| Vitamin A                     | 30%             |
| Vitamin C                     | 0%              |
| Calcium                       | 2%              |
| Iron                          | 6%              |

\* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.