
Low Sodium Diet Tips

What is Sodium?

Sodium is a mineral found naturally in small amounts in foods such as meat, dairy, poultry, and vegetables. Most of the sodium we eat is in the form of sodium chloride (salt).

Sodium plays many important roles for the human body to function properly. Eating too much sodium raises blood pressure, increases the risk of stroke, reduces the effect of some medicines, and causes fluid to build up in the body. Fluid buildup in your body can further cause damage by making your heart, liver and kidneys work harder.

Your body only needs a little amount of sodium daily. Foods don't have to taste salty to have sodium in them. It is possible to eat too much sodium even without use of a saltshaker. Over 75% of sodium comes from processed and restaurant foods. 11% comes from salt added to food when cooking or eating. Examples of high-sodium foods are:

- All forms of salt (table salt, sea salt, seasoning salt)
- Processed foods: canned items, lunch meats, frozen foods, cheese
- Snack foods: vegetable juices, chips, granola bars, popcorn
- Condiments/Sauces: ketchup, mayonnaise, barbecue sauce, soy sauce, teriyaki sauce, tartar sauce, salad dressings, cheese sauces, gravy

A low sodium diet limits salt to 1,500-2,000 milligrams (mg) per day or less than 1 teaspoon (tsp) per day.

Salt preference is an acquired taste that can be unlearned. In about 6- 8 weeks your taste buds will adjust to lower sodium eating and high sodium foods you used to enjoy may be way too salty to your liking.

Tips to Reduce Sodium Intake:

When Shopping: Use the Nutrition Facts Food Label. Shop Smart:

- When reading a Nutrition Facts label, look at the sodium content.
- Choose foods with 140 mg sodium or less per serving.
- Avoid food with more than 300 mg of sodium per serving.

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- Check the serving size on the Nutrition Facts Label. The amount of sodium listed on the label is per serving not for total servings found in packaged item. Some Nutrition Facts Labels may also indicate the total amount of sodium in the package.
 - Use % 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.
 - Claims on food labels about sodium can help guide you.
 - Products that state salt-free, sodium-free, low sodium and very low sodium have less than 140 mg per serving.
 - Products that have the words unsalted, no salt added, reduced sodium or lower sodium may still be high in sodium.
 - 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. Look for ingredients that contain sodium: saline, sodium benzoate, sodium bicarbonate (baking soda), sodium chloride (salt), sodium nitrate, and monosodium glutamate (MSG).
 - Check the fine print on packaging. Look for words like “broth”, “saline” or “sodium solution”.

Choose Fresh Foods:

- Cook from scratch if you can.
- Control sodium intake by using fresh or frozen fruit and vegetables.
- Fresh meats, chicken, and fish are lower in sodium than processed, canned, lunch, cured or smoked meats such as sausage, bacon, ham, brats and or hotdogs.
- Choose meats without added salt water or saline.

When Preparing/Cooking Foods:

- Enhance the natural flavor of foods by adding onions, garlic, herbs, spices, citrus fruits or citrus juices, and vinegars in place of some or all the salt.
- Make your own salt-free seasoning blend at home.
- Avoid seasonings that contain the word salt like onion salt and garlic salt.
- Choose onions or garlic powder and sodium-free herbs blends.
- Roast, sear, sauté, braise and grill to bring out the natural flavors of foods.

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- Drain and rinse canned foods such as beans, tuna, and vegetables in a strainer and cook them in fresh water (instead of the canned fluid) to remove some excess sodium.

When Eating at Restaurants:

- Choose carefully. Restaurant foods can be high in sodium.
- Ask if your food can be prepared without the extra salt.
- Taste your foods before adding salt. If not flavorful enough trying adding pepper or lemon juice before adding table salt.
- Look for words like pickled, smoked, cured, au jus, soy sauce, miso or Teriyaki sauce. These words indicate foods with high in salt.
- Asked for salad dressing and sauces to be served on the side.
- Control your portion size. A smaller portion= less sodium. Take the rest home.
- Look for Nutrition facts at the restaurant's website or ask if there is more information available at the restaurant.

Ask before using a salt substitute:

- Salt substitutes that look and taste like salt usually contain high amounts of potassium. Too much potassium can cause serious problems for those with certain medical conditions or those taking certain medications. Check with your doctor or dietitian before using a salt substitute.