



Low Sodium Diet

Low Sodium Diet Overview

Sodium is an element that is naturally found in many foods. The body requires a small amount of sodium in the diet to control blood pressure and blood volume. However, most people consume many times the amount of sodium needed. A healthy level of sodium in the diet contains fewer than 2.3 grams (2300 milligrams, or about the amount of sodium in one teaspoon) of sodium each day. People with certain medical conditions such as high blood pressure, kidney disease, and heart problems can benefit from a diet that is lower in sodium.

Where is sodium found?

The main sources of sodium in the diet are processed foods, restaurant prepared foods, and salt added to food at the table. Processed foods include prepared frozen meals and ice cream, canned foods, soups, pickled foods, snack foods, lunch meats, cheese, condiments, sauces, dressings, breads, and cereals, just to name a few. Sodium found in processed food accounts for approximately 80 percent of a person's daily sodium intake in a typical Western diet and can quickly add up, even without adding more salt to meals.

How do I cut down on sodium?

Suggestions to decrease sodium include the following:

- Be aware that you may experience a perceived decrease in food flavor in the beginning, but other pleasurable tastes and flavors will emerge within two weeks.
- Consider cutting back further on the sodium in your meals to allow for the sodium in your snacks. Many online food tracking apps can help you achieve this goal.
- Put away the saltshaker and reduce or eliminate salt used in cooking. Experiment with adding flavor with herbs, spices, garlic, onions, or lemon instead.
- Look for low-sodium products such as spice blends and read labels for serving size and sodium content on canned, bottled, and frozen foods.
- Make a list of healthy low-sodium foods to substitute. Many grocery stores now supply this information.
- When dining out, request that the food be prepared without salt, ask for dressings or sauces to be put on the side, and avoid bacon bits, cheese, and croutons at the salad bar.
- Do not add salt to your food before eating. Teach family members to taste food before adding salt.
- Avoid fast food. If this is not possible, choose restaurants that offer fruits or vegetables without sauces or dressings. Ask that no salt be used to prepare food, when possible.
- Do not use salt substitutes that are high in potassium unless a health care provider tells you to do this. Herb and spice combinations that are salt-free are widely available and can be used to flavor foods.

- Water softeners remove calcium and add sodium to drinking water. Do not drink softened water. When purchasing bottled water, check the label to ensure that it does not contain sodium.
- Look at labels for over-the-counter medications. Avoid products that contain sodium carbonate or **sodium bicarbonate**. (Sodium bicarbonate is another name for baking soda.)
- Fresh fruits and vegetables are naturally low in sodium. In addition, a diet rich in fruits and vegetables provides additional benefits in lowering blood pressure. The DASH diet (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) is a well-known intervention to treat high blood pressure. The DASH diet requires the person to eat four to five servings of fruit, four to five servings of vegetables, and two to three servings of low-fat dairy, and all foods must contain less than 25 percent total fat per serving.

Foods to choose

- Breads – Whole-grain breads, English muffins, bagels, corn and flour tortillas, biscuits, most muffins
- Cereals – Many cooked low-salt (read the label to determine sodium content) hot cereals (not instant) such as oatmeal, cream of wheat, rice, or farina, puffed wheat, puffed rice, shredded wheat
- Crackers and snack foods – All unsalted crackers and snack foods, unsalted peanut butter, unsalted nuts or seeds, unsalted popcorn
- Pasta, rice, and potatoes – Any type of pasta (cooked in unsalted water), potatoes, white or brown rice
- Dried peas and beans – Any cooked dried beans or peas (without seasoning packet), or low-salt canned beans and peas
- Meats and protein – Fresh or frozen beef, poultry, and fish; low-sodium canned tuna and salmon; eggs or egg substitutes
- Fruits and vegetables – Any fresh, frozen, or canned fruit, any fresh or frozen vegetables without sauce, canned vegetables without salt, low-salt tomato sauce/paste
- Dairy products – Milk, cream, sour cream, non-dairy creamer, yogurt (be sure to read labels for serving size)
- Fats and oils – Plant oils (olive, canola, corn, peanut), unsalted butter or margarine
- Soups – Salt-free soups and low-sodium bouillon cubes, unsalted broth, homemade soup without added salt
- Sweets – Gelatin, sherbet, pudding, ice cream, some baked goods, sugar, honey, jam, jelly, marmalade, syrup
- Beverages – Coffee, tea, soft drinks, fruit-flavored drinks, low-salt tomato juice, any fruit juice
- Condiments – Fresh and dried herbs; lemon juice; low-salt mustard (not commercially available but can be made at home), vinegar, and "hot" sauce; low- or no-salt ketchup; seasoning blends that do not contain salt

Foods to avoid

- Breads – Biscuits, prepared mixes (pancake, muffin, cornbread), instant hot cereals, many boxed cold cereals, self-rising flour
- Crackers and snack foods – Salted crackers and snack items (chips, pretzels, popcorn), regular peanut butter, prepared dips/spreads, salted nuts or seeds
- Pasta, rice, and potatoes (processed or from restaurants) – Macaroni and cheese mix; rice, noodle, or spaghetti mixes; canned spaghetti; frozen lasagna; instant potatoes; seasoned potato mixes
- Beans and peas – Beans or peas prepared with ham, bacon, salt pork, or bacon grease; most canned beans and peas unless labeled as low-sodium
- Meats and proteins – Salted, smoked, canned, spiced, and cured meat, poultry, or fish; many deli meats and poultry, unless stated to be low salt; bacon; ham; sausage; lunch meats; hot dogs; breaded frozen meat, fish, or poultry; frozen dinners and other frozen meals; pizza
- Fruits and vegetables – Regular canned vegetables and vegetable juices, regular tomato sauce and tomato paste, olives, pickles, relishes, sauerkraut, frozen vegetables in butter or sauces, crystallized and glazed fruit, maraschino cherries, fruit dried with sodium sulfite
- Dairy products – Buttermilk, Dutch-processed chocolate milk, processed cheese slices and spreads, most cottage cheese, aged or natural cheeses
- Fats and oils – Prepared salad dressings, bacon, salt pork, fatback, salted butter or margarine
- Soups – Regular canned or prepared soups, stews, broths, or bouillon; packaged and frozen soups
- Desserts – Packaged baked goods
- Beverages – Softened water; carbonated beverages with sodium or salt added; regular tomato or vegetable juice; some alcoholic beverages (variable sodium content)
- Sauces, dressings, and condiments – Table salt, lite salt, bouillon cubes, meat extract, taco seasoning, Worcestershire sauce, tartar sauce, ketchup, tomato and chili sauces, cooking sherry and wine, onion salt, mustard, garlic salt, soy sauce, tamari, meat flavoring or tenderizer, steak and barbecue sauces, seasoned salt, monosodium glutamate (MSG), Dutch-processed cocoa, many salad dressings