

# Sodium (Salt): What You Need To Know



Allina Health

## **Sodium (Salt)**

Eating a healthful diet low in sodium (salt) is an important part of staying healthy. When you eat a lot of sodium, your body retains more water to dilute it. This extra fluid makes your heart work harder to pump blood throughout your body.

Sodium is a compound that is found in nature and added to foods. Many foods have sodium naturally, but do not taste salty.

Most people have too much sodium in their diet. Eating too many foods high in sodium can be harmful.

Too much sodium can cause high blood pressure. This puts you at a higher risk for heart disease and stroke.

If you have heart failure, kidney disease or liver disease, too much sodium can cause your body to retain (keep) water.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2010 recommends that Americans should reduce the amount of sodium they eat each day to 2,300 mg.

If you have kidney disease, diabetes, heart disease or high blood pressure, you should follow a low-sodium diet of 2,000 mg of sodium or less each day.

If you have heart failure, limit your sodium to 1,500 to 2,000 mg a day.

Talk with your health care provider about how much sodium is right for you.

## Ways to Reduce Sodium in Your Diet

A craving for salt is not your body's way of telling you are low on salt. It is a learned response. Since the craving for salt is learned, it can be unlearned.

Within one to three months of limiting salt, cravings will lessen and even disappear.

- Remove the salt shaker. Do not have it in the kitchen when you cook or on the table when you eat.
  - Beware of commercially prepared salt substitutes.
    - Most salt substitutes are made of potassium chloride.
    - Your health care provider must OK the use of a salt substitute because it can interfere with the action of some medicines or medical conditions.
    - Using a salt substitute does not allow you to wean yourself from the craving for salt.
  - Eliminate salt in your cooking.
  - Eliminate obviously salty foods. These include:
    - flavored or seasoned salts
    - pickles, olives and sauerkraut packaged in salt brine
    - processed or cured meats such as ham, sausage, deli meats, hot dogs, and jerky
    - salted soups and salted snacks.
  - Try new seasonings.
    - Herbs and spices by themselves do not have sodium.
    - Check labels to make sure seasonings and spices you buy do not have salt or sodium.
    - You may use flavored vinegar, sherry, wine and lemon juice for flavoring.
    - Try to grow herbs in your house or garden.
- 2 Parsley, thyme and basil are easy to grow.

- Learn to read food labels.
  - Figure out one serving size.
  - Compare one serving size to the amount you eat.
  - Figure out how much sodium the product contains for your serving size.
  - Low sodium is 140 mg or fewer per serving. Beware of 400 to 600 mg (or more) of sodium per serving.
  - If salt is listed in the first five ingredients, the item is too high in sodium.
  - Beware of ingredients that contain sodium such as monosodium glutamate (MSG), sodium nitrate, sodium benzoate and sodium bicarbonate.
- **Consider smaller portions to keep meal sodium amounts to less than 600 mg.** Suggestion: Buy single serve snacks or food items to control portions.
- Make a spice blend recipe. OK, so you're ready to throw out the salt — but save the shaker! Fill it with this spice blend and use it on home-cooked meals:
  - 4 tablespoons dry mustard
  - 1 tablespoons garlic powder
  - 4 tablespoons onion powder
  - 2 tablespoons white pepper
  - 1 tablespoon thyme
  - 1 teaspoon basil
  - 4 tablespoons paprika.

Combine the spices and blend them well. Put a small amount of rice in the bottom of your shaker to allow the spice blend to flow easily. Fill the shaker with the spice blend, using a funnel. Label and store.

- Make an herb blend recipe. This blend of herbs and spices is good on meats and vegetables:

- 1 teaspoon each:
  - dried basil
  - dried marjoram
  - thyme
  - dried oregano
  - dried parsley
  - ground cloves
  - ground mace
  - black pepper
  - dried savory
- ¼ teaspoon each:
  - ground nutmeg
  - cayenne.

Vary the amounts to suit your taste. Fill the shaker with the spice blend, using a funnel. Label and store.

## Herb and Spice Suggestions

Try these flavor ideas:

- beef: bay leaf, curry, dry mustard, sage, marjoram, mushrooms, nutmeg, onion, pepper, thyme
- lamb: curry, garlic, mint, pineapple, rosemary
- pork: apples, applesauce, garlic, onion, sage, peaches
- veal: apricots, bay leaf, curry, ginger, marjoram, oregano

- fish: bay leaf, lemon juice, marjoram, mushrooms, paprika
- chicken: cranberries, paprika, thyme, sage
- asparagus: lemon juice
- corn: green pepper, tomato
- green beans: marjoram, lemon juice, nutmeg, dillweed, unsalted French dressing
- peas: onion, mint, mushrooms, green pepper
- potatoes: onion, mace, green pepper
- squash: ginger, mace, onion, cinnamon
- tomatoes: basil, marjoram, onion.

## How to Choose Low-sodium Foods

If you are eating 1,500 to 2,000 mg of sodium each day, this chart may help in planning your meals and snacks. It is best to limit yourself to only one food each day with more than 400 mg of sodium per serving. The following are foods that are low and high in sodium.

### ■ Milk products:

- Eat: yogurt, low-sodium, cheese and dried or fluid milk.
- Avoid: processed cheese (American) and cheese spreads.

### ■ Meat:

- Eat: fresh or frozen fish, poultry, beef, pork, lamb, veal, low-sodium tuna, low-sodium bacon and eggs.
- Avoid: canned meat and fish, sausage, pickled herring, ham, bacon, cold cuts, corned or dried beef, beef jerky, anchovies, herring, kosher meats, sardines, luncheon meats, frankfurters and bratwurst.

### ■ Vegetables and fruits:

- Eat: fresh or frozen unsalted vegetables, canned vegetables or tomato products with no added salt, dried beans, peas, lentils, all fruits and low-sodium canned vegetables.
- Avoid: sauerkraut, vegetables or potatoes with sauces or seasoning mixes, pickled vegetables, olives, canned tomato products or juice and vegetables canned with salt.

### ■ Grains:

- Eat: graham crackers, saltines with unsalted tops, Melba toast, rolls, unsalted bread sticks, homemade pancakes and waffles (no salt added), potatoes, rice, pasta, breads and cereals with less than 180 mg of sodium per serving, unsalted pretzels or popcorn, low-sodium chips and crackers, potatoes, rice or noodles made without salt.
- Avoid: mixes (stuffing, rice, pancakes, biscuits, casseroles, potato and noodle), salted crackers, salted snack food: potato chips, pretzels, popcorn, instant cooked cereals and commercially prepared refrigerated dough.

### ■ Combination foods:

- Eat: homemade combination foods and soups with less or no salt, and commercial low-sodium soups.
- Avoid: chow mein, pot pies, canned stew or casseroles, TV dinners with more than 600 mg sodium per serving, canned and dried soups and bouillon.

### ■ Beverages:

- Eat: sparkling water, unsoftened water, fruit juices or drinks, lemonade, coffee, tea, pop and beverages with less than 70 mg of sodium per serving.
- Avoid: commercial sports drinks (such as Gatorade®, Instant Preplay® or Take Five®), softened water, cocktail beverage mixes and instant cocoa.

### ■ Other:

- Eat: oil, vinegar, lemon juice, fresh or powdered onion or garlic, salt-free herbs and spice mixes, flavoring extracts, homemade gravy with less or no salt, salt-free bouillon or broth, unsalted ketchup, mustard, barbeque sauce, salt-free nuts and seeds, table wine (not cooking wine) and homemade salad dressings.
- Avoid: all pickles, olives, seasoned salts, MSG, soy sauce, tenderizers, commercial gravy mixes, light-salt products, cooking wine and salted nuts and seeds.

## How to Dine Out on a Low-Sodium Diet

There are many ways to help reduce your sodium intake while eating out. Your choices will vary with the type of eating situation. Follow these steps to successfully lower your sodium while eating out.

- Ask that your food be made without salt.
- Bring your own spice blend, salt-free seasoning or salt substitute.
- Choose food that doesn't need a lot of preparation, such as broiled, baked or roasted meats made without sauces, breading or batters.
- Order sauces and au jus (on the side) and use them sparingly.

- Try lemon juice or vinegar oil for salad dressing, or ask that regular salad dressing be served “on the side” and use them sparingly.
- Bring your own low-sodium salad dressing.
- Choose fresh fruit or fruit juice for an appetizer.
- Choose beverages lower in sodium, such as coffee, tea, milk, soda pop or lemonade. Avoid buttermilk, tomato juice and vegetable juice.
- Choose lean, fresh meats for sandwich fillings rather than processed meats and meat salads.
- Ask for fresh fruit, unsalted french fries, lettuce, tomato and onion to go along with sandwiches (instead of pickles and potato chips).
- Choose ice cream, sherbet, gelatin or fruit for dessert rather than higher-sodium items such as pies and pastries. (Avoid malts or shakes.)

### **How to Order From Fast Food Restaurants**

- Skip foods with cheese, bacon or cream.
- Avoid appetizers.
- Skip sauces and gravies.
- A plain hamburger or non-breaded chicken is a better choice than a fried fish sandwich.
- Skip the pickles, olives, mayonnaise, bacon, cheese and sauces (“extras”).
- Choose meat or fish that is baked, broiled, grilled, poached, roasted or steamed.

- Choose oatmeal instead of a roll or muffin.
- Try lemon juice or vinegar and oil instead of dressing.
- Ask for a side salad, fruit or steamed vegetables without salt instead of fries or potato chips.
- Choose baked potatoes. Skip the butter and sour cream.
- Choose low-fat or fat-free yogurt, sherbet or fresh fruit for dessert.
- Skip foods that are breaded and fried.
- Avoid malts or shakes.
- Drink water, plain coffee or low-fat milk (skim or 1 percent).

Source: Twin Cities Dietetic Association.



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