

## How to Lower Sodium in Your Diet

This handout is about sodium (salt) and how to lower the amount in your diet.

### How much sodium is needed by the body?

Our body needs about 500 mg (milligrams) or about ¼ teaspoon (tsp) of sodium daily.

This amount helps the body to:

- Send nerve impulses (signals).
- Contract and relax muscles.
- Keep water and mineral balance.

Most people eat about 3400 mg of sodium in their diet each day. This is much higher than needed. Keep sodium (salt) intake to less than 2000 mg per day or the amount your medical team suggests.

### Why lower sodium (salt) in your diet?

Eating too much sodium can increase your risk of high blood pressure. This can lead to heart disease and stroke. Excess salt in the diet can:

- Increase water retention. This causes, puffiness, bloating, and weight gain.
- Increase your risk for:
  - Stroke
  - Heart failure
  - High blood pressure
  - Enlarged heart muscle
  - Kidney disease and stones
  - Headaches
  - Osteoporosis

Lowering salt helps to:

- Lower your blood pressure.
- Reduce puffiness, bloating and help in weight loss.
- Reduce the strain on your heart.
- Reduce shortness of breath.
- Allow your medicines to work better.

### How much sodium is in salt?

2300 mg sodium = 1 tsp salt

1,725 mg sodium = ¾ tsp salt

1,150 mg sodium = ½ tsp salt

575 mg sodium = ¼ tsp salt

### What other foods besides salt have high sodium?

Most (70%) of the sodium in the diet comes from eating packaged and prepared foods. Sodium is added to these foods during manufacturing. Most canned soups, lunch meats, frozen dinners, and many meals eaten at restaurants also are very high in sodium.

### Why is sodium added in processed foods?

Because it adds flavor and acts as a binder and stabilizer in food. Adding salt preserves the food and prevents bacteria from growing. This way it can last for months. Foods like meats, baked foods and grains may not taste salty but still have a lot of sodium.

Highest sources of sodium come from:

- Pizza made with pepperoni or sausage.
- Cold cuts, cured meats, sausages, cheese.
- Canned soups and other canned goods.
- Burritos and tacos – made with these toppings (sauces, cheese, salsa, tortilla chips).
- Convenience foods.

### How much daily sodium should I have?

Aim for no more than 2000 mg of sodium or the goal set by your doctor. The American Heart Association suggests you limit sodium intake to 1500 mg a day if you have high blood pressure. To start, cut down on your daily sodium intake by 1000 mg. This will

help improve heart health and blood pressure. You can then move towards a goal of 2000 mg or less per day.


### How can one start cutting back salt?

Start tracking sodium in the diet by:

1. Read the nutrition facts label. The amount of sodium per serving is listed in milligrams (or mg).

<b>Cholesterol</b> 30mg	10%
<b>Sodium</b> 470mg	20%
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 31g	10%

2. Read the ingredients list. Look for words like “sodium,” “salt” and “soda.” This means salt is added in other forms which may not be added in the total amount listed on the label.

	<b>INGREDIENTS:</b>
	WATER, SUGAR, DEXTROSE, CITRIC ACID, NATURAL AND ARTIFICIAL FLAVOR, SALT, SODIUM CITRATE, MONOPOTASSIUM PHOSPHATE, MODIFIED FOOD STARCH, GLYCEROL ESTER OF ROSIN, BLUE 1

Some ingredients to watch out for include:

- Sodium attached to any of these: Nitrate, citrate, bicarbonate, chloride, diacetate, erythorbate, glutamate, lactate, lauryl sulfate, metabisulfite, phosphate
- Monosodium glutamate (MSG) or sodium benzoate
- Disodium guanylate (GMP)
- Disodium inosinate (IMP)
- Fleur de sel
- Himalayan pink salt, Kosher salt, rock salt, salt, sea salt
- Trisodium phosphate

3. Note the serving size on the nutrition facts label. Eating more than what is listed as 1 serving means eating more sodium. In the example below, one serving is 1 cup which gives 470 mg sodium. The package has 2 servings. If you eat the whole package, you will eat 940 mg sodium (470 mg + 470 mg).

Sample label for Macaroni & Cheese

<b>Nutrition Facts</b>	
Serving Size 1 cup (228g) Servings Per Container 2	
Amount Per Serving	
<b>Calories</b> 250	Calories from Fat 110
	% Daily Value*
<b>Total Fat</b> 12g	18%
Saturated Fat 3g	15%
Trans Fat 3g	
<b>Cholesterol</b> 30mg	10%
<b>Sodium</b> 470mg	20%

4. Look for these sodium-related terms on food packages.
  - Sodium-free: Less than 5 mg of sodium per serving and has no added salt.
  - Very low sodium: 35 mg or less per serving.
  - Low sodium: 140 mg or less/serving.
  - Reduced (or less) sodium: At least 25% less sodium per serving than the original product.

## Strategies When Shopping for Food

Compare labels. Choose the product with the lowest amount of sodium (per serving). Different brands of the same food can have different sodium levels.

Pick fresh and frozen poultry. Read the labels and look at the fine print on the packaging for terms like “broth,” “saline” or “sodium solution.” These words mean that salt has been injected in them.

Select condiments with care. For example, soy sauce, bottled salad dressings, dips, ketchup, jarred salsas, capers, mustard, pickles, olives and relish can be very high in sodium. Look for a reduced- or lower-sodium version.

Get canned vegetables labeled “no salt added” and frozen vegetables without salty sauces.

Get products with the American Heart Association’s Heart-Check mark.



## Preparing Food

Use onions, garlic, herbs, spices, citrus juices and vinegars to add flavor. Check out recipes at American Heart Association website. Use herbs and spices in place of all or some salt.

Drain and rinse canned beans and peas (like chickpeas, kidney beans, etc.) and vegetables if “no added salt” or “low sodium” is not available.

Combine lower-sodium versions of food with regular-sodium versions. If you don’t

like the taste of lower-sodium foods, try combining it in equal parts with a regular version of the same food. Try this with broths, soups and tomato-based pasta sauces.

Cook pasta, rice and hot cereal without salt.

Grill, braise, roast, sear and sauté to bring out natural flavors.

Include foods that are high in potassium like sweet potatoes, potatoes, greens, tomatoes and lower-sodium tomato sauce, white beans, kidney beans, nonfat yogurt, oranges, bananas and cantaloupe. Potassium helps counter the effects of sodium and may help lower your blood pressure.

## Restaurants

- Ask for your dish to be made without salt or less salt.
- Add freshly ground black pepper or squeeze fresh lemon or lime, especially on fish, chicken and vegetable dishes to boost flavor.
- Avoid foods with these words: pickled, brined, barbecued, cured, smoked, broth, au jus, soy sauce, miso or teriyaki sauce. They are very high in sodium.
- Order foods that are steamed, baked, grilled, poached or roasted as these have less sodium.
- Control portion sizes. Ask if smaller portions are available. Share the meal with a friend or ask for a to-go box when you order and place half the meal in the box to eat later. When you cut calories, you cut sodium.
- Chain restaurants with 20 or more locations give nutrition information that lists sodium content. Some restaurants post this on a website and/or share upon request.

### **What if food tastes bland?**

The natural flavor of food is enhanced with less salt, especially when you use cooking techniques and flavorful ingredients listed above. Over time, your taste buds will adjust.

### **Salt Substitutes**

There are many salt substitutes. Some replace some or all of the sodium with potassium. With certain medical conditions (like kidney disease) and medicines, salt substitutes can affect potassium levels. Talk with your healthcare team about whether a salt substitute is right for you. Some examples of salt substitutes are listed below.

The products with an asterisk (\*) have high amounts of potassium (1 tsp has more than 1500 mg). None of these should be used by anyone with kidney disease.

- Spike Salt Free<sup>®</sup>
- Veg-It<sup>®</sup>
- \*Adolph's Sodium Free Tenderizer<sup>®</sup>
- Accent Low Sodium Seasoning<sup>®</sup>
- Salt Sense<sup>®</sup>
- Pleasoning Mini-Mini Salt<sup>®</sup>
- \*Morton Lite Salt<sup>®</sup>
- \*Morton Salt Substitute<sup>®</sup>
- \*No Salt<sup>®</sup> or \*Nu-Salt<sup>®</sup>

### **Are sea salt, kosher salt, and Himalayan salt healthier than table salt?**

Kosher or sea salts enhance taste, texture and color. All of these contain same amount of sodium as regular salt. Sea salt and other salts may have trace levels of minerals like magnesium, potassium and calcium. We get these from other healthy foods and don't need it from salt.

### **Change Salty Ways in 21 Days**

#### **Week 1: Breads and Rolls / Cold Cuts and Cured Meats**

- Look for lower sodium items.
- Track sodium intake.
- Track how much sodium you've cut.

#### **Week 2: Pizza / Poultry**

- Get pizzas with less cheese and meats.
- Add veggies to your pizza.
- Use fresh poultry rather than fried, canned or processed.

#### **Week 3: Soups / Sandwiches**

- One cup of chicken noodle soup can have up to 940 mg of sodium.
- Check labels and try lower sodium foods.
- Use lower sodium meats, cheeses and condiments and plenty of vegetables to build a healthy sandwich.

#### **Herbs, Spices and Seasonings: Add Flavor Without the Salt**

- Lemon/lime juice, citrus zest
- Lawry's Seasoned Pepper<sup>®</sup>
- Dry mustard
- Scallions, onions, shallots
- Vinegar
- Onion and garlic powder
- Fresh garlic
- Tabasco Sauce<sup>®</sup>
- Dried horseradish
- Celery powder
- Fresh or dried herbs
- Flavored pan sprays
- Molly McButter<sup>®</sup>
- Pepper (white/black)
- Fresh hot peppers and hot sauces
- Mrs. Dash

## **General Tips**

Foods vary in sodium content. Always check labels. Try to select foods with low or moderate sodium. Portion size makes a difference in sodium amounts.

## **Foods Low in Sodium (0-35 g/serving)**

### **Bread, Cereal, Rice, Pasta**

- Puffed wheat and rice
- Shredded wheat, slow cook hot cereal cooked without salt
- Rice, pasta, noodles cooked without salt

### **Vegetables**

- Fresh vegetables
- Frozen vegetables without any sauces
- Canned if no salt added
- Any cooked without salt

### **Fruits**

- Fresh, frozen, or canned fruit and fruit juice

### **Dairy Products**

- Low-sodium cheese

### **Meat, Poultry, Fish, Dried Beans, Eggs, Nuts**

- Eggs
- Unsalted peanut butter
- Beans, peas and lentils (cooked dry without salt)

### **Fats and Oils**

- Oils, nuts (lightly salted)
- Low sodium salad dressings (oil and vinegar)

### **Sweets**

- Honey, jam, jelly, gelatin, hard candies, sherbet

- Carbonated soft drinks, sugar-free powdered drink mixes

## **Miscellaneous**

- Coffee, tea, vinegar

## **Foods Moderate in Sodium (35-140 mg/serving)**

### **Bread, Cereal, Rice, Pasta**

- Bread, biscuits, muffins, pancakes, baked goods, crackers without salt, some ready to eat cereals

### **Vegetables**

- Fresh or plain frozen vegetables: All cooked with less than 1/8 tsp salt

### **Fruits**

- Dried fruits

### **Dairy Products**

- Milk, yogurt, cheese, ice cream, puddings

### **Meat, Poultry, Fish/seafood, Dried Beans, Eggs, Nuts**

- Fresh meat, poultry, fish (check label)
- Peanut butter
- Frozen fish fillets
- Fresh shrimp
- Low or reduced sodium tuna
- Reduced sodium deli meats

### **Fats and Oils**

- Butter, tub margarine, mayonnaise
- Most salted nuts

### **Sweets**

- Cakes, cookies
- Pies, doughnuts, pastries
- Cocoa
- Ice cream

## **Foods High in Sodium (140 mg or more per serving)**

### **Bread, Cereal, Rice, Pasta**

- Many ready to eat cereals, instant hot cereals crackers, breads, and snack foods
- Noodle mixes, instant potatoes, stuffing

### **Vegetables**

- Canned vegetables, pickles, sauerkraut
- Regular tomato or V-8® juices

### **Dairy Products**

- Cottage cheese, buttermilk

### **Meat, Poultry, Fish, Dried Beans, Eggs, Nuts**

- Bacon, ham, Canadian bacon
- Canned fish and meat
- Corned beef, dried beef
- Frankfurters/brats, hotdogs, sausage
- Deli meats, breaded shrimp
- Veggie burgers and soy products that resemble meat
- Smoked fish
- Some fresh meats injected with sodium solution (pork, chicken)
- Rinsed canned beans

### **Fats and Oils**

- Bacon drippings, gravies
- Most salad dressings

### **Sweets**

- Cream pies

## **Miscellaneous**

- Canned soup, marinades
- BBQ sauce, chili sauce
- Soy sauce, mustard, ketchup
- Seasoned salts
- Frozen entrees
- Broth/bouillon
- Olives, steak sauce

## **Who to Call**

If you are a UW Health patient and have more questions, please contact UW Health at one of the phone numbers listed below.

You can also visit our website at

[www.uwhealth.org/nutrition](http://www.uwhealth.org/nutrition).

Nutrition clinics for UW Hospital and American Family Children's Hospital can be reached at: **(608) 890-5500**.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright 10/2023. University of Wisconsin Hospital and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Clinical Nutrition Services Department and the Department of Nursing. HF#180