

Low-Salt Diet

How does salt affect the body?

Salt is also called sodium. The right amount of salt helps your body:

- Keep the right balance of fluids in your body
- Send messages through your nerves
- Relax or tighten muscles

When you have too much salt in your diet, your body holds onto water. This can cause swelling and can make it harder for your heart to work well. Eating a diet high in salt also raises blood pressure. Blood pressure is the force of blood against artery walls as the heart pumps blood through the body. High blood pressure can damage your heart, kidneys, brain, and eyes. Many people find that cutting down on salt lowers their blood pressure. Eating a diet high in salt also increases the amount of calcium lost in your urine. This can lead to osteoporosis (brittle bones) and kidney stones.

A low-salt diet limits the amount of sodium in your diet to no more than 2300 milligrams (mg) a day, which is about 1 teaspoon of salt.

Some people are more sensitive to the effects of salt than others. You may need to lower the sodium in your diet to 1500 mg a day if:

- You are 51 or older.
- You have high blood pressure, diabetes, or kidney disease.
- You are African American.

Talk with your healthcare provider about the right amount of sodium for you.

What can I learn from food labels?

Most of the salt in the average diet comes from processed foods, including canned or boxed foods and restaurant foods. Foods may contain a lot of sodium even if they don't taste salty. Read labels carefully. Look for any form of sodium or salt, such as sodium benzoate, sodium citrate, baking powder, baking soda, and monosodium glutamate (MSG). Check to see how much sodium is in 1 serving of food. Choose foods that are labeled sodium or salt free, or low sodium, or foods that have less sodium than the regular version. Here are some of the things you may see on food products and what they mean:

- **Sodium-free or salt-free.** 1 serving of this product = 5 mg of sodium or less
- **Very low sodium.** 1 serving of this product = 35 mg of sodium or less
- **Low sodium.** 1 serving of this product = 140 mg of sodium or less
- **Reduced or less sodium.** 1 serving of this product = at least 25% less sodium than the regular version.
- **Lite or light in sodium.** 1 serving of this product = at least 50% less sodium than the regular version.

- **Unsalted or no salt added.** No salt is added during processing of a food. However, some foods are naturally high in sodium.

How can I cut back on salt in my diet?

The taste for salt is mainly a habit. If you slowly lower the amount of salt in your diet, your taste for salt will begin to change. After a while, food will start tasting better without salt than it did with it.

Here are some other ways to cut back on salt:

- Add very little or no salt to food when you cook or bake. Season foods with herbs and spices. Use onions, garlic, parsley, lemon and lime juice and rind, dill weed, basil, cilantro, marjoram, thyme, curry powder, turmeric, cumin, paprika, vinegar, or wine to flavor foods. Avoid spice blends that include salt, such as garlic salt.
- Do not add salt to food at the table.
- Eat fresh foods instead of canned or packaged foods as much as possible. Also, plain frozen fruits and vegetables usually do not have added salt.
- Add a pinch of sugar or a squeeze of lemon juice to bring out the flavor in fresh vegetables.
- If you use canned products, look for the ones that are low-sodium or no salt added. Rinse canned vegetables with tap water before cooking.
- Use unsalted, polyunsaturated margarine instead of regular margarine or butter.
- Eat low-sodium cheeses. Many are also low fat.
- Drink low-sodium juices.
- Make unsalted or lightly salted soup stocks and keep them in the freezer to use instead of canned broth and bouillon.
- Eat tuna and salmon, rinsing it first with running water.
- Fast foods are very high in salt, as are many other restaurant foods. When you eat at a restaurant, try steamed fish and vegetables or fresh salads. Avoid soups.
- Avoid eating the following foods unless you can find unsalted or low-sodium versions:
 - Ketchup, mustard, pickles, olives, and salad dressing
 - Soy sauce, steak or barbecue sauce, chili sauce, and Worcestershire sauce
 - Bouillon, beef broth, and chicken broth
 - Cured meats or fish such as bacon, luncheon meats, and canned sardines
 - Canned vegetables, soups, boxed foods, and frozen dinners
 - Salty cheeses and buttermilk
 - Salted nuts and peanut butter
 - Self-rising flour and biscuit mixes
 - Salted crackers, chips, popcorn, and pretzels
 - Instant cooked cereals

Salt substitutes

Ask your healthcare provider before you use a salt substitute. Most salt substitutes contain potassium. If you are taking certain medicines or have other health problems, you may need to be careful about the amount of potassium in your diet.

Where can I get more information?

- Ask your healthcare provider for information about nutrition, diet, and health.
- Find a dietitian in your area from the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics web site: <http://www.eatright.org/programs/rdfinder/>
- Look for low-salt cookbooks such as the American Heart Association Low-Salt Cookbook.

Take time to plan and enjoy your meals. You will be pleasantly surprised at how good food can be without salt, and how lowering the sodium in your diet lowers your blood pressure.

Developed by RelayHealth.

This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.

Sodium Content in Foods

Food	Serving	Sodium Content (mg)
Grains and grain products		
Cooked cereal, rice, or pasta, unsalted	1/2 cup	0 to 6
Ready-to-eat cereal	1 cup	100 to 360
Bread	1 slice	110 to 175
Vegetables		
Fresh or frozen, cooked without salt	1/2 cup	1 to 70
Canned or frozen with sauce	1/2 cup	140 to 460
Tomato juice, canned	1 cup	500 to 650
Fruit		
Fresh, frozen, canned	1/2 cup	0 to 15
Low-fat or fat-free dairy foods		
Milk	1 cup	103 to 115
Yogurt	8 oz	130 to 175
Natural cheeses	1 1/2 oz	54 to 395
Processed cheeses	1 1/2 oz	365 to 600
Nuts, Seeds and dry beans		
Peanuts, salted	1 oz	91 to 192
Peanuts, unsalted	1/3 cup	2
Beans, cooked from dried or frozen without salt	1/2 cup	0 to 5
Beans, canned	1/2 cup	332 to 655
Meats, fish and poultry		
Fresh meat, fish, poultry	3 oz	30 to 90
Tuna canned, water pack, no salt added	3 oz	35 to 45
Tuna canned, water pack	3 oz	250 to 320
Ham, lean, roasted	3 oz	908
Egg	1 egg, raw	60 to 80
Fast foods, condiments, and sauces		
Fast food hamburger, single patty	1 sandwich	472 to 640
Fast food hamburger, double patty	1 sandwich	742 to 791
Fast food French fries	Medium	221 to 326
Catsup	1 tablespoon	136
Mustard	1 teaspoon	57
Soy sauce	1 tablespoon	879
Table salt	1 teaspoon	2325

Copyright ©2014 McKesson Corporation and/or one of its subsidiaries. All rights reserved.