

How to Lower Sodium in Your Diet

For people with diabetes

This handout explains why it is important for people with diabetes to watch how much sodium they eat. It includes tips on foods you can eat instead of high-sodium options.

Why is sodium important?

Sodium (salt) plays an important role in the body. It helps control fluid balance and maintain blood pressure.

But, too much sodium in the diet can increase blood pressure in many people. High blood pressure can harm your kidneys. It can also increase your risk of heart disease. If you have diabetes, reducing your sodium may lower your risk of having these problems.

How much sodium is OK?

Most Americans eat more than 3,400 mg of sodium each day. All people, including people with diabetes, should eat no more than 2,300 mg of sodium each day. Some people with diabetes may need to eat less sodium. Talk with your healthcare provider about how much sodium is right for you.

What foods contain the most sodium?

Sodium is naturally present in many foods. But, most of the sodium we eat is in foods that are packaged, processed, or made in a restaurant.

To reduce your sodium intake, choose foods that are low in sodium. Also, be careful not to add too much salt when preparing food or at the table.

Low-Sodium Foods

These foods are low in sodium, so it is OK to eat them more often:

- Fresh fruits and vegetables (starchy and non-starchy)



Fresh fruits and vegetables are naturally low in sodium.

- Dried beans, peas, and legumes
- Whole grains prepared without salt, such as brown rice, wild rice, oats, quinoa, popcorn, and whole grain barley
- Unsalted seeds, nuts, and nut butters
- Most fresh or frozen meat, poultry, and fish with no added salt water or saline

Do I need to give up the foods I love?

This table shows low-sodium options to choose instead of high-sodium foods.

| | Instead of This | Sodium | Try This | Sodium |
|---|--|---------------|---|---------------|
| Frozen meals | Turkey frozen meal, with gravy, dressing, potatoes, and vegetable (Banquet Value) (1 meal) | 854 mg | Turkey diet frozen meal, with dressing, gravy, vegetable, and fruit (Healthy Choice) (1 meal) | 432 mg |
| Fast foods | Hamburger, with tomato and/or catsup, bun, and french fries (1 medium order) | 806 mg | Hamburger, with tomato and/or catsup, and bun (1 medium order) | 550 mg |
| Pasta with tomato sauce | Spaghetti cooked in salted water (1 cup) Tomato sauce (1/2 cup) | 325 mg | Spaghetti cooked in unsalted water (1 cup) | 1 mg |
| | | 513 mg | Tomato sauce, low sodium (1/2 cup) | 37 mg |
| Canned soups or broths | Chicken noodle soup (1 cup) | 829 mg | Chicken noodle soup, low sodium, ready-to-serve (1 cup) | 426 mg |
| Cheese | Individually wrapped cheese singles (1 oz.) | 367 mg | Fresh mozzarella (1 oz.) | 178 mg |
| Vegetables or beans | Canned green beans, drained and cooked (1 cup) | 399 mg | Frozen green beans, cooked (1 cup) | 1 mg |
| Processed meats (such as hot dogs, bacon, sausage) or deli meats (such as ham, turkey) | Ham, luncheon meat, prepackaged or deli (2 slices) | 736 mg | Ham, luncheon meat, deli or prepackaged, low salt (2 slices) | 543 mg |
| Condiments (such as soy sauce, teriyaki sauce, salsa, catsup, taco sauce, pickle relish) | Soy sauce (1 tablespoon) | 879 mg | Soy sauce, reduced sodium (1 tablespoon) | 576 mg |

What else can I do to reduce the sodium in my diet?

Here are some quick tips on how to reduce your sodium intake:

| At the Store | At Home | At the Restaurant |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read nutrition labels and compare products. Choose the one with the least sodium. • To season your foods, buy lemon juice, garlic, herbs, and salt-free seasonings and spices. • Buy salt substitutes if your healthcare provider says they are OK for you. Salt substitutes use <i>potassium chloride</i> instead of <i>sodium chloride</i>. Too much potassium may be harmful to some people, so check with your provider first. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoy foods prepared at home, where you can control how much salt you add. • To keep track of how much salt you add to foods, in the morning each day, fill an empty salt shaker with $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of salt. This is equal to 500 or 1,000 mg of sodium (about $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ of your day's suggested intake). Make sure you include this amount when adding up your sodium intake for the day. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many chain restaurants offer nutrition information online. If so, check their menu before you go out. Plan to order items that are lower in sodium. • Ask your server for small changes to make your meal less salty. For example, you could ask for a green salad instead of french fries with your meal. • Ask your server to bring sauces on the side so that you can control how much you use. • Ask for a take-out box when you order your meal. When you get your food, put half of it in the box right away and save it to eat the next day. |

Where can I find low-sodium recipes?

Visit these websites for low-sodium recipes to make at home:

- www.eatingwell.com/recipes_menus/collections/healthy_low_sodium_recipes
- www.diabetes.org/mfa-recipes/recipes/
- cooking.nytimes.com/tag/low-sodium
- www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/recipes/low-sodium-recipes/rcs-20077197
- www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/resources/heart/syah-html

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

If you are a patient at:

- Endocrine and Diabetes Care Center**, call 206.598.4882 weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- A UW Neighborhood Clinic**, call 206.520.5000 weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.