

# Tips for a Low Sodium Diet

Sodium is a mineral found as a natural ingredient in many foods. The most common form of sodium is salt. The low-sodium diet allows you 1/8-teaspoon of salt per day to use in food preparation or at the table. Salt substitutes use potassium instead of sodium and may be used under the guidance of a doctor. However, salt substitutes should not be used with some medications. Check with a doctor to be sure that salt substitutes may be used after changes in medication.

Below is a list of recommended foods for a low-sodium diet and a list of those to avoid.

## Recommended Foods

Milk and Dairy Products (limit to 2 cups)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whole, 2 percent, 1 percent, skim, fluid evaporated, or powdered milk</li> <li>• Yogurt, chocolate milk</li> <li>• Low sodium buttermilk</li> <li>• 1 cup of milk equals 130mg sodium</li> </ul>
Meat Group (limit four to six ounces daily)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Four to six ounces per day of cooked weight of any meat, poultry (beef, lamb, pork, veal, liver, chicken, duck or turkey), or fish prepared or preserved without salt or sodium</li> <li>• Canned tuna or salmon rinsed, or low-sodium tuna and low sodium salmon</li> <li>• One egg daily or 1/3 cup egg substitute daily, including what is used in cooking</li> <li>• Low sodium peanut butter (2 tablespoons equals 1 ounce of meat), unsalted nuts</li> <li>• 1 ounce low sodium cheese or low sodium cottage cheese may be substituted for 1 ounce of meat</li> <li>• Canned kidney beans, rinsed, and frozen dinners with less than 500mg sodium</li> </ul>
Vegetables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unlimited amounts of fresh, frozen (without salt or sodium added), or salt-free canned vegetables or vegetable juices without salt or sodium added</li> <li>• Include a good source of Vitamin A at least every other day such as a dark green or a deep yellow vegetable</li> </ul>

Fruits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any kind of fruit or fruit juice, fresh, frozen, or canned, except those listed in foods to avoid</li> <li>• Include a good source of Vitamin C daily such as citrus fruit or juice, strawberries, raw cabbage, or cantaloupe</li> </ul>
Bread and Cereals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Four slices of regular bread or equivalent per day (bread, rolls, or crackers without salted tops)</li> <li>• Sandwich rolls equal two servings of bread</li> <li>• One (3/4 ounce) serving of dry cereal per day (250mg or less)</li> <li>• Cereals cooked without added salt</li> <li>• You may use salt free bread, rolls, and crackers as desired</li> <li>• Rice, macaroni, spaghetti, noodles, or barley prepared without added salt</li> <li>• Unsalted popcorn or pretzels</li> </ul>
Fats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Four teaspoons per day of regular salted butter, margarine, mayonnaise, or mayonnaise-type salad dressing or low-sodium mayonnaise</li> <li>• Unsalted butter, margarine, or salad dressing is not restricted</li> <li>• Cooking fat or oil</li> <li>• Low sodium salad dressings, cream, non-dairy creamers, sour cream</li> <li>• Unsalted nuts, avocado</li> </ul>
Soups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Home made soups made without salt or restricted seasonings</li> <li>• Low sodium bouillon, broth, and soups</li> <li>• Low sodium cream soups made from milk allowance and allowed foods</li> </ul>
Beverages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coffee, decaffeinated coffee, tea, cereal beverages such as Postum</li> <li>• Sodium containing carbonated beverages limited to 24 ounces per day</li> <li>• Alcoholic beverages with doctor's permission</li> <li>• Cocoa made with milk allowance without added salt</li> </ul>
Desserts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gelatin desserts or diet gelatin as desired</li> <li>• Fruit ice; home-made tapioca, rice and cornstarch pudding, or custard made with allowed milk and egg allowance and without the addition of salt or sodium</li> </ul>

Miscellaneous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spices and herbs which do not contain sodium or salt compounds</li> <li>• Vinegar, lemon, fresh horse radish without added salt, baking powder, and baking soda for allowed baked products only, cream of tartar, Tabasco sauce, Veg-It, Mrs. Dash, yeast, low-sodium catsup, low-sodium baking powder, low-sodium baking soda, low sodium chili sauce</li> <li>• Salt substitute or seasoned salt substitute blend containing no sodium with a doctor's approval</li> </ul>
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### **Foods to Avoid**

Milk and Dairy Products (limit to 2 cups)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid more than 2 cups per day</li> <li>• Buttermilk, malted milk, milk shakes, chocolate milk</li> </ul>
Meat Group (limit four to six ounces daily)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any salted, smoked, cured, pickled, dried or canned meat, fish or poultry such as bacon, bacon bits, turkey bacon, bologna, chipped or corned beef, breaded meats, frankfurters, bratwurst, ham, meats koshered by salting, luncheon meats, salt pork, sausage, anchovies, caviar, pickled herring, or sardines</li> <li>• Regular peanut butter, salted nuts</li> <li>• Regular cottage cheese and all other cheese except those listed on the allowed list</li> <li>• Canned baked beans</li> <li>• Canned, packaged and frozen dinners with more than 500mg sodium</li> </ul>
Vegetables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sauerkraut, pickles, olives, and other vegetables prepared in a brine</li> <li>• Canned and frozen vegetables if processed with salt or sodium</li> <li>• Salted potato chips, instant potatoes, or potato mixes</li> <li>• Regular vegetable or tomato juice</li> </ul>
Fruits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crystallized or glazed fruit</li> </ul>
Bread and Cereals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not more than four slices per day of sodium containing breads or rolls; not more than 1 3/4 cup serving daily of dry cereal</li> <li>• Breads, rolls, and crackers with salted tops</li> <li>• Pretzels and other salted snack foods</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-rising flour, mixes containing salt or sodium, biscuit mixes, instant cooked cereals, especially avoid those with added salt or sodium compounds</li> <li>• Cornbread and commercial mixes (i.e., pancake, waffle, rice, or pasta mixes, biscuit, etc.) unless low in sodium</li> <li>• Stuffing mixes, regular bread crumbs, or cracker crumbs</li> </ul>
Fats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sodium-containing salad dressings, bacon and bacon fat, tartar sauce, and salted nuts</li> <li>• Gravies made with mixes or bouillon cubes</li> <li>• Cream cheese</li> <li>• Snack dips made with instant soup mixes or processed cheese</li> </ul>
Soups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular canned and dehydrated package soups, broths, bouillon, and consommé</li> </ul>
Beverages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instant cocoa mixes</li> <li>• Water with softening equipment</li> </ul>
Desserts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other desserts with less than 125mg sodium</li> <li>• More than one serving per day of regular cake, cookies, pie, sherbet, custard, ice cream, and ice milk</li> <li>• Instant pudding, whipped topping</li> </ul>
Miscellaneous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Salt, flavored salts, mono-sodium glutamate (MSG), prepared horseradish, prepared mustard, catsup, meat sauces, chili sauce, barbeque sauces, meat tenderizers, soy sauce, teriyaki sauce, tartar sauce, Worcestershire sauce, flavored vinegar, relish, olives, pickles, salted snack foods, salted snack foods, salted nuts, cooking wine</li> <li>• Dutch processed cocoa or chocolate</li> <li>• Read labels on mixed spices to be sure there is not an addition of salt</li> <li>• Sea salt, lite salt (Morton's), Kitchen Bouquet, Butter Buds</li> </ul>

## Substitutions and Hints

<p>Season foods with herbs and spices. Use onions, garlic, parsley, lemon and lime juice and rind, dill weed, basil, tarragon, marjoram, thyme, curry powder, turmeric, cumin, paprika, vinegar, or wine to enhance the flavor and aroma of foods. Mushrooms, celery, red pepper, yellow pepper, green pepper, and dried fruits also enhance specific dishes.</p>
<p>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.</p>
<p>Add a pinch of sugar or a squeeze of lemon juice to bring out the flavor in fresh vegetables.</p>
<p>If you must use canned products, use the low-sodium types (except for fruit). Rinse canned vegetables with tap water before cooking.</p>
<p>Substitute unsalted, polyunsaturated margarine for regular margarine or butter.</p>
<p>Eat low-sodium cheeses. Many are available now, some with herbs and spices that are very tasty, and many are also low-fat.</p>
<p>Drink low-sodium juices.</p>
<p>Make unsalted or lightly salted soup stocks and keep them in the freezer to use as substitutes for canned broth and bouillon. Use these broths to enhance vegetables.</p>
<p>Substitute wines and vinegars (especially flavored vinegars) for salt to enhance flavors.</p>
<p>Eat tuna and salmon packed in water instead of oil and rinse first with running water.</p>
<p>Use one or more of the following to season chicken: curry, turmeric, cumin, cilantro, tarragon, thyme, sage, onions, garlic, mushrooms, tomatoes, or orange, lemon, or lime juice with ginger.</p>

Use one or more of the following to season beef: dry mustard, marjoram, thyme, bay leaf, pepper, red wine, mushrooms, onions, red or green pepper, parsley, curry, green chilies, or orange rind.

Use one or more of the following to season seafood: lemon, parsley, paprika, wine, garlic and onions, cilantro, ginger, bay leaf, fennel, dill, marjoram, or thyme.

Use one or more of the following to season noodles: basil, oregano, fresh tomatoes, onions, garlic, green pepper, red pepper, yellow pepper, low-salt salad dressings, pine nuts, or low-salt mozzarella cheese.

Cook rice in homemade broth with mushrooms and scallions or shallots.

### **Reading Labels**

If a product changed to a lower sodium level, you may see these various terms alerting you to the changes:

- Reduced or less sodium: At least 35 percent less sodium than the original version of the product
- Light in sodium: At least 50 percent less sodium than the original version of the product
- Low sodium: 140mg of sodium (or less) per serving
- Sodium free: Less than 5mg of sodium per serving

### **Dining Out**

When dining out, you can reduce the sodium content of a meal by trying these simple suggestions:

- Use pepper, lemon juice, or bring your own salt free seasoning for flavor.
- Go easy on condiments and sauces. Mustards, catsup, salad dressings, sauces and gravy substantially increase the amount of sodium in a meal.
- Request that food is prepared without added salt and ask for sauces, salad dressing, and gravy be served on the side.
- Recognize words that indicate a high sodium content; marinated, pickled, smoked, au jus, teriyaki, soy sauce or broth.

- Keep it simple. Often special sauces and toppings add extra sodium to foods. Ordering a broiled cut of meat or fish is a better choice than entrees covered with special sauces. Plain meat-type sandwiches are lower in sodium than chicken, egg, or tuna salad sandwiches.

Adapted from “Reduce Salt and Sodium in your Diet,” National Institutes of Health, retrieved from <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov>, October 2013.