

Low Sodium Guidelines

What is sodium?

Sodium is a mineral that occurs naturally in some foods. It is also the main ingredient in table salt. In the United States, we tend to add a lot of salt to our food. In addition, we eat many convenience and processed foods to which salt has been added as a flavor enhancer and preservative.

How much sodium should be in my diet?

Without sodium, our bodies cannot work properly. We need sodium in our diets to promote a proper balance of body fluids. However, too much sodium can be harmful. For most people, the recommended sodium intake is 1,500 to 2,300 mg. per day. Ask your health care provider if this is right for you.

Why should I be concerned about how much sodium is in my diet?

A diet high in sodium is linked to high blood pressure. High blood pressure can increase your risk for stroke, heart disease and kidney failure. A typical American diet contains an average of 8,000 to 10,000 mg. of sodium!

To lower your sodium intake, try the following:

- Read the nutrition facts label when buying packaged foods. This will help you to know how much sodium is in your diet.
- Use vegetables that are fresh, frozen or low-sodium canned.
- Rinse canned fish even if it is packed in water.
- Use cheese that contains less than 200 mg. of sodium per ounce.
- Buy low-sodium varieties of soups, sauces, crackers and snack foods.
- Use fresh or powdered herb seasonings like onion powder, garlic powder, sage, rosemary and thyme.
- If you use antacids, look for a low-sodium variety.

Limit:

- Frozen dinners (Aim for less than 500 mg. of sodium per meal.)
- Salty condiments (soy sauce, teriyaki sauce, steak sauce and marinades)
- Convenience foods (instant mashed potatoes, instant oatmeal, prepackaged rice and noodle mixes)

Avoid:

- Processed meats (ham, hot dogs, bacon, bologna, kielbasa, salami)
- Processed cheeses (American)
- Regular canned tomato or vegetable juices
- Canned or dried soups unless they are labeled sodium free
- Salty snack foods (potato chips, pretzels, nuts)
- Seasoned salts (garlic salt, celery salt, onion salt, lemon pepper)
- Fast foods (If you do occasionally eat them, make sure you don't add table salt.)

Do not:

- Use salt at the table
- Use salt in cooking (a teaspoon of salt contains 2,300 mg. of sodium)

What else do I need to know?

People with kidney problems or those taking certain types of medications should check with their health care provider before using salt substitutes. Many salt substitutes contain potassium chloride. Too much potassium can be harmful for these people.

You can lower your sodium intake and still enjoy tasty meals. A low- sodium diet is only part of a treatment plan to reduce blood pressure. There are other things that you can do to help reduce your blood pressure:

- Maintain a desirable weight.
- Limit alcohol and caffeine.
- Exercise regularly.
- Manage stress.
- Don't smoke.

If you have questions, a nutrition education specialist is available to help at
1-508-852-6175 or 1-888-392-0183.