

Trinity Hypertension Research Institute

Punzi Medical Center

Low Salt Intake Guidelines

AHA Recommendation

Healthy American adults should eat no more than 2,300 milligrams of sodium a day. This is about 1 teaspoon of sodium chloride (salt). To illustrate, the following are sources of sodium in the diet.

1/4 teaspoon salt	= 600 mg sodium
1/2 teaspoon salt	= 1,200 mg sodium
3/4 teaspoon salt	= 1,800 mg sodium
1 teaspoon salt	= 2,400 mg sodium
1 teaspoon baking soda	= 1000 mg sodium

What are the common sources of sodium?

When you must reduce the amount of sodium (salt) you eat, be aware of both natural and added sodium content. Table salt is sodium chloride. It's 40 percent sodium by weight. When you buy prepared and packaged foods, read the labels. Watch for the words "soda" (referring to sodium bicarbonate, or baking soda) and "sodium" and the symbol "Na." These products contain sodium compounds.

Some drugs have high amounts of sodium. Carefully read the labels on all over-the-counter drugs. Look at the ingredient list and warning statement to see if the product has sodium. A statement of sodium content must be on labels of antacids that have 5 mg or more per dosage unit (tablet, teaspoon, etc.). Some companies are now producing low-sodium over-the-counter products. If in doubt, ask your doctor or pharmacist if the drug is OK for you.

Most spices naturally contain very small amounts of sodium.

How can I reduce the sodium in my diet?

- Choose fresh, frozen or canned food items without added salts.
- Select unsalted nuts or seeds, dried beans, peas and lentils.
- Limit the amount of salty snacks you eat, like chips and pretzels.
- Avoid adding salt and canned vegetables to homemade dishes.
- Select unsalted, fat-free broths, bouillons or soups.
- Select fat-free or low-fat milk, low-sodium, low-fat cheeses, as well as low-fat yogurt.
- Specify what you want and how you want it prepared when dining out. Ask for your dish to be prepared without salt.
- Use spices and herbs to enhance the taste of your food.

Limiting sodium — which we get through salt, baking powder, baking soda and other substances in foods we eat — is one of the most important things that people with high blood pressure can do. Sodium makes the body hold on to fluid. To pump the added fluid, the heart has to work harder. People with high blood pressure shouldn't put this extra strain on their hearts.

Physicians often recommend keeping salt intake below 2,300 milligrams (mg) per day for most people. This is about one teaspoon of salt. However, for people with heart failure, recommended sodium intake is no more than 2,000 mg per day. Most people eat considerably more than this, so it's likely that a person with congestive heart failure will need to find ways to cut down on salt.

Here are some tried-and-true strategies for reducing sodium intake. Start small and gradually work up to bigger changes. (We've tried to arrange the strategies that way.)

Choosing low-sodium alternatives

- Read food labels to check salt content (listed as "sodium"). Start with what's in the cabinet right now, so you can stop buying any high-sodium foods.
- People with heart failure should watch out for the various forms of sodium (for example, sodium alginate, sodium sulfite, sodium caseinate, disodium phosphate, sodium benzoate, sodium hydroxide, monosodium glutamate or MSG, sodium citrate).
- Check your medicine cabinet. People with heart failure should avoid headache or heartburn medicines that contain sodium carbonate or bicarbonate.
- Look for canned vegetables labeled with "no salt added." Look for "low-salt" or "low-sodium" labels on cans and packages. This label isn't allowed on the can or package unless the food has 140 milligrams or less sodium per serving. However, it's still important to read the label to see exactly how much it does contain.

Avoiding high-sodium foods

This recommendation is probably the hardest to follow, because so many convenience foods (like prepackaged meals and soups) and snacks (potato chips and popcorn) are high in sodium. But most of us take in more sodium through these foods than by using table salt. That's why it's essential to cut back and eventually eliminate them. The foods below are usually high in sodium (but read the labels, because some may be available in a low-salt or unsalted form):

- Canned soups and dry soup mixes
- Canned meats and fish (buy water-packed tuna or salmon instead)
- Ham, bacon and sausage
- Salted nuts and peanut butter
- Instant cooked cereals
- Salted butter and margarine
- Processed meats, such as deli items and hot dogs
- Prepared mixes (pancake, muffin, cornbread, etc.)
- Prepackaged frozen dinners (unless one serving has less than 400 mg of sodium)
- Pre-seasoned mixes (tacos, chili, rices, sauces, gravies, etc.)
- Snack foods (pretzels, potato chips, olives, cheeses, pickles)
- Salad dressings
- Fast food

Tips on table salt

- Take the salt shaker off the table.
- Cook without salt.
- Discuss using salt substitutes with your doctor.

Limiting salt when you cook

- Avoid any seasonings that taste salty, including:
 - bouillon cubes
 - cooking sherry or cooking wine
 - chili sauce
 - meat tenderizer
 - seasoned salts
 - soy sauce
 - steak sauce
 - tamari
 - Worcestershire sauce
- Instead, try cooking with low-salt seasonings, such as lemon juice, vinegar and herbs.
- Drain and rinse canned foods before preparing them to remove some of the salt.
- Substitute fresh fruits and vegetables and other low-sodium foods for canned and processed foods. Use canned vegetables with no salt added. Select brown rice or plain white instead of flavored rice (such as chicken- or beef-flavored, or any rice that comes with a packet of powdered seasoning).

Checklist for lowering your sodium intake

- Don't use salt during cooking. (Try a salt-free seasoning substitute.)
- Don't salt food before you taste it.
- Substitute herbs and spices as food flavoring.
- Eat less salted potato and corn chips, lunchmeat and hot dogs, salt pork, ham hocks, dill pickles and many canned foods. All of these have a lot of salt.
- Eat more fresh fruits and vegetables and less canned or frozen ones.
- Use fresh fruit and raw vegetables as snacks instead of chips or salted nuts.
- Look at food labels — many canned and frozen foods say "low salt" or "low sodium."
- Select unsalted nuts or seeds, dried beans, peas and lentils.
- Avoid adding salt and canned vegetables to homemade dishes.
- Select unsalted, fat-free broths, bouillons or soups.
- Select fat-free ("skim") milk or low-fat milk, low-sodium, low-fat cheeses, as well as low-fat yogurt.
- When dining out, be specific about what you want and how you want it prepared. Request your dish be prepared without salt.
- Learn to use spices and herbs to enhance the taste of your food.