MAYO CLINIC

PATIENT EDUCATION

Guidelines for Controlling Sodium

EDUCATION
learning
EXCELLENCE
HEALTHY
LIVING
CARING
INTERACTION

BARBARA WOODWARD LIPS
PATIENT EDUCATION CENTER

Name

Patient registration number

Healthcare Professional

Date

If you have questions about your diet, please contact:

Registered dietitian

Telephone

Table of Contents

What is Sodium? 3

How to Read a Food Label 4

Things to Know About Salt 5

Guidelines for Food Choices 7

Eating Away From Home 14

Food Safety 16

Conclusion 17

This information offers basic guidelines to help lessen the amount of sodium or salt in your diet. You may wish to schedule an appointment with a dietitian to plan a diet that meets your medical and nutritional needs.

What is Sodium?

Sodium is a mineral that attracts and holds water. In the right amounts, it helps keep the balance of fluids your body needs. However, most people take in more sodium than they need. Lowering how much sodium you take in can help lower blood pressure and lessen the amount of fluid that builds up in your body. This may help your body and its organs, such as the heart, kidney and liver, to work better.

Sodium is found naturally in most foods. Fruits, vegetables and plain, unprocessed grains have smaller amounts of sodium. One main source of added sodium in a person's diet is salt or sodium chloride that is added to food during cooking or at the table. Another source of sodium comes from sodium added during the making or processing of foods. Examples of high-sodium processed foods include commercial soups, luncheon meats, processed cheese and prepackaged meals.

You are usually told to follow a low sodium diet with 2,000 milligrams (mg) or less of sodium a day. This is about 600 milligrams of sodium for each meal or 200 milligrams of sodium per serving of food. Ask your dietitian or a care team member if there is a total amount of sodium you should take in each day. If you want more information about planning a diet that meets your medical and nutritional needs, ask your healthcare team for an appointment with a dietitian.

How to Read a Food Label

Food labels appear on most foods sold in the United States. The nutrition information on food labels can help you decide whether to include a particular food in your diet.

Nutrition facts

The "Nutrition Facts" section of a food label lists how much sodium is in the product, along with other nutrition information. Learning how to read nutrition labels and knowing which foods have more sodium can help control how much sodium you take in. Look for the following on the food label:

Serving size and amount of sodium

Compare the serving size listed on the package with the amount you plan to eat or drink. If you eat or consume more than the stated serving size, multiply the sodium content by the number of servings you have actually eaten or drank. For the food item shown in Figure 1, a 16-piece serving contains 230 mg of sodium. If you eat or drink all 14 servings, you take in 3220 mg of sodium.

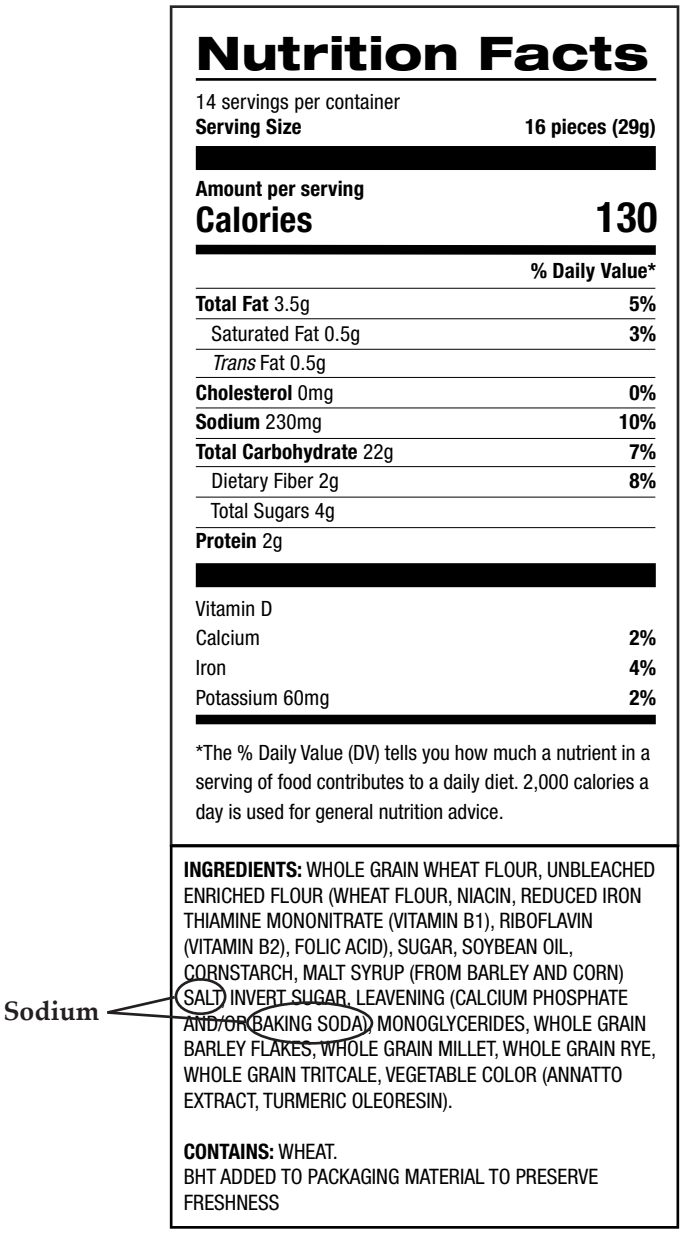


Figure 1. Example of where to find sodium on Nutrition Facts

Things to Know About Salt

Sodium content

When food companies do not add salt or sodium to processed foods, the product may be labeled with the following:

- "Unsalted."
- "No salt added."
- "Without added salt."

The following terms may appear on food labels and each one means something different:

- "Reduced sodium" – The original product sodium content is lessened by 25%. These products may still have large amounts of sodium.
- "Light" or "Light in sodium" – The original sodium content of the product is lowered by at least 50%. These products may still have large amounts of sodium.
- "Low sodium" – Foods with less than 140 milligrams of sodium per serving.
- "Very low sodium" – Foods with less than 35 milligrams of sodium per serving.
- "Sodium free" – Foods with less than 5 milligrams of sodium per serving.
- "Unsalted" or "No salt added" – The food is made without added salt. There still could be large amounts of sodium in the product.

Ingredients list

Read the ingredients list on the food label before buying. Sodium may be listed as:

- Salt
- Sodium
- Na, the chemical symbol for sodium
- Sodium chloride
- Baking soda
- Monosodium glutamate, also known as MSG
- Sodium citrate
- Sodium ascorbate
- Sodium benzoate
- Sea salt

Note: Watch for other ingredients with the word "sodium" in the name.

Salt substitutes

Talk with a care team member or dietitian before using potassium-containing salt substitutes. Salt substitutes, such as Morton's Salt Substitute, Morton's Lite Salt or No Salt, usually have potassium chloride. Too much potassium may be harmful for people with certain medical conditions and may change how medications work.

Medicines

Antacids, alkalizes, such as Alka-Seltzer and Bromo-Seltzer, laxatives, and cough medicines may have large amounts of sodium. Read the label or ask your pharmacist about how much sodium is in your medication. Buy sodium-free brands when possible.

Other salts

Any product that has salt in the title probably has sodium in it. Labels may list sea salt, kosher salt, lite salt and reduced salt blends. To be sure, check the label. These foods do not necessarily have a significantly lower amount of sodium. If sodium is listed on the label, the product is a salt product and you should try not to use it.

Guidelines for Food Choices

The following tables show which foods are better choices on a sodium-controlled diet. Check the "Nutrition Facts" part of the food label to see the serving size and how much sodium each serving size has. Even if a food item is recommended for a low-sodium diet, it is important to watch portion sizes of all foods. Try to have a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean protein with smaller amounts of sugar and saturated and trans fats.

Some low-sodium products may be located in a specialty section of the grocery store. If you cannot find a low-sodium product, ask your grocer if one is available.

Fruits

One serving of fruit means:

- 1 piece of fresh fruit (about the size of a tennis ball).
- 1 cup of chopped fresh fruit or berries.
- ½ cup unsweetened canned fruit or 4 ounces of juice.

Better Choices	Foods to Limit
• Fresh, frozen, unsweetened canned and dried fruit • No-sugar-added fruit juice	• Dried fruits with sodium added

Vegetables

One serving of vegetables means:

- ½ cup cooked vegetables or 1 cup of raw vegetables.

Better Choices	Foods to Limit
• Fresh, frozen, no-salt-added canned vegetables • No-salt-added tomato juice or vegetable juice cocktail • No-salt-added tomato products in a can or jar	• Frozen or canned vegetables that have added salt – do not use those packaged with sauce or butter, or with breading • Salted tomato juice or vegetable juice cocktail • Salted tomato products in a can or jar • Sauerkraut, pickled vegetables, and olives

Grains or starches

One serving grains or starches means:

- 1 slice of bread, ½ cup cooked grain (pasta, rice, cereal), or 1 ounce of snack grains, such as crackers, pretzels, or chips.

Whole grain starch products are the best choice. Try to have more than half of your grain or starch choices from whole grains. Whole grains are typically those with the first ingredient listed on food label reading "whole grain" or those with 3 grams of fiber per serving

Many grain or starch-based foods can have added sodium. Because of this, choose grains or starches that have less than 200 mg of sodium.

Better Choices	Foods to Limit
• Bread, dinner rolls, bagels, English muffins, pita • Unsweetened cereals, regular oatmeal or hot cereals • Unsalted or low sodium popcorn, pretzels, chips, crackers – choose baked or low fat • Potatoes, rice, pasta (prepared without salt) • Low-sodium soups, bouillon, or broth • Homemade pancake, muffin, and bread mixes	• Croissants, scones, biscuits • Instant oatmeal or hot cereals • Salted popcorn, pretzels, chips, crackers • Mixes or convenience packaged, canned, or frozen grain or starch items such as pasta salad, rice mixes, oriental noodles, stuffing, potato mixes, casseroles • Commercial canned soups, broth, bouillon, dried soup mixes • Prepared pancake, muffin, and bread mixes • Commercial refrigerated or frozen dough products

Meat or meat substitutes

One serving of meat means:

- About the size of your palm or a deck of cards (3 ounces).
- 1 egg, 1 tablespoon peanut butter, 1 ounce nuts, 1/2 cup legumes, 4 ounces tofu.

Do not eat meats labeled "flavor enhanced," "marinated," "saline solution added," "moisture enhanced," or "broth added." These meats may have added sodium. Read the food label to make sure it does not have added salt.

Better Choices	Foods to Limit
• Fresh or frozen plain meats, such as beef, pork and poultry, fish, or wild game – choose lean cuts • Low-sodium and water-packed tuna or chicken • Sodium-reduced luncheon meats – nitrate free • Eggs – limit yolks • No-salt-added peanut butter or nut butter • No-salt-added nuts • Dried legumes or no-salt-added canned legumes – navy, pinto, or kidney beans, chickpeas, or lentils • Unsalted tofu	• Meats or fish that are salt cured, processed, pickled, or smoked – such as bacon, chipped beef, corned beef, hot dogs, ham, sausage, pickled herring, sardines, jerky • Regular luncheon meats • Regular peanut butter or nut butter • Salted nuts • Canned legumes – such as navy, pinto, or kidney beans, chickpeas, or lentils • Salted tofu

Milk and other dairy

One serving of dairy means:

- 1 cup of milk, 6 ounces of yogurt or 1 ounce of cheese.

Choose low fat or fat free dairy products to decrease saturated fat intake.

Better Choices	Foods to Limit
• Milk - use unflavored • Yogurt • Low-sodium cheeses, hard cheeses like cheddar, Swiss, Monterey Jack, mozzarella, low-fat cream cheese, low fat sour cream – make sure to control portion size	• Flavored milks – such as chocolate, strawberry • Buttermilk • Cottage cheese • Cheese spreads or processed cheeses – such as CheezWiz and Velveeta

Desserts, sweets and fats

*Limit added sugar and fat as part of a healthy, balanced diet.

Better Choices	Foods to Limit
• Fresh fruit, gelatin, fruit ices, Popsicles, sherbet, meringue, frozen yogurt or low-fat ice cream, homemade pies or puddings without added sodium • Jam, jelly, honey • Hard candy, jelly beans • Oils – olive, canola • Unsalted margarine or butter - use spray, whipped or soft tub	• Instant beverage mixes – hot cocoa, flavored coffee, cocktail mixes, club soda, commercial sport drinks • Cakes, muffins, cookies or pies made with salted ingredients • Instant pudding and pie filling mixes • Commercial salad dressings, gravies and sauces

Seasoning with herbs and spices

Use herbs, spices and salt-free seasonings to increase the flavor of food. Herbs and spices should make the food taste better, but not be too strong. The correct blend of herbs and spices for any dish is what tastes best to you.

Better choices

- Herbs, spices, salt-free herb and spice mixes, such as Mrs. Dash
- Garlic powder, onion powder
- Pepper
- Lemon juice, flavoring extracts, vinegar
- Horseradish sauce that has no added salt*
- Table wine - not cooking wine*
- Ketchup that has no-added-salt*
- Mustard that has no-added-salt*
- Meat and barbeque sauces that have no added salt*
- Commercial salsa that has no-added-salt*

Not recommended

- Seasoning salts and mixes, such as celery salt, garlic salt, onion salt
- Meat tenderizer
- Salted marinades*
- Soy sauce, teriyaki sauce, miso
- Cooking wine

* Choose items with reduced, lite or low sodium if possible. If you cannot find a no-salt-added choice, use the regular bottle in small amounts.

Seasoning suggestions

Meat and eggs

Beef: Allspice, basil, bay leaf, chili powder, dill, dry mustard, ginger, marjoram, nutmeg, onion, pepper, sage, thyme

Chicken: Cinnamon, cranberry sauce, dill, garlic, ginger, lemon juice, mace,

marjoram, nutmeg, oregano, paprika, parsley, rosemary, sage, tarragon, thyme

Eggs: Basil, chervil, chives, curry, dry mustard, green pepper, marjoram, oregano, paprika, pepper, tarragon, thyme

Fish: Allspice, basil, bay leaf, chervil, chives, curry, dry mustard, lemon juice, oregano, paprika, sage, thyme

Lamb: Allspice, basil, curry, dill, garlic, ginger, mint, mint jelly, oregano, rosemary

Pork: Basil, cinnamon, garlic, onion, rosemary, sage, thyme

Veal: Bay leaf, curry, ginger, marjoram, tarragon

Vegetables

Asparagus: Basil, garlic, lemon juice, tarragon

Broccoli: Basil, lemon juice, mace, nutmeg, oregano, tarragon

Cabbage: Caraway seeds, dill, fennel, oregano, savory

Carrots: Allspice, cinnamon, cloves, dill, ginger, mint, nutmeg, parsley, thyme

Cauliflower: Basil, dill, nutmeg, tarragon

Corn: Basil, chili powder, chives, green pepper, nutmeg

Green beans: Basil, dill, lemon juice, marjoram, nutmeg, oregano, rosemary, unsalted French dressing

Lima beans: Marjoram, minced chives, onion, parsley

Peas: Allspice, basil, mint, onion, parsley, thyme

Potatoes: Basil, chopped green pepper, dill, mace, marjoram, onion, parsley, thyme

Squash: Basil, cinnamon, cloves, ginger, mace, sage

Sweet potatoes: Cinnamon, cloves, ginger, nutmeg

Tomatoes: Basil, onion, oregano, rosemary, sage

Other foods

Breads: Anise, caraway seeds, fennel seeds, poppy seeds

Dried beans: Cayenne, curry, cumin, chili powder, garlic, onions

Indian dishes: Cardamom, cayenne, coriander, cumin, curry, garlic, ginger, mustard seeds, turmeric

Mexican dishes: Cayenne, chili powder, chorizo, coriander, cumin, fresh chilies (green and red), garlic, oregano

Oriental dishes: Cayenne, cumin, garlic, ginger, green pepper, sesame

Popcorn: Curry, garlic powder, onion powder

Rice: Basil, cumin, curry, green pepper, oregano, saffron, turmeric

Salads: Basil, chervil, dill, lemon juice, parsley, tarragon, vinegar

Salad dressing: Caraway, celery seed, chervil, chives, ginger, mustard, pepper, turmeric

Homemade cream soups: Bay leaf, dill, marjoram, paprika, peppercorns, tarragon

Homemade vegetable soups: basil, bay leaf, curry, dill, garlic, onion, oregano, thyme

A seasoning recipe that has low sodium

Herbed seasoning blend

2 tablespoons Dried and crumbled dill weed or basil leaves

2 tablespoons Onion powder

1 teaspoon Dried and crumbled oregano leaves

¼ teaspoon Grated dried lemon pepper

Pinch Freshly ground pepper

Combine all ingredients in a small bowl and blend well. Spoon seasoning into a shaker. Store seasoning in a cool, dark place.

The following recipe has low sodium

Easy vegetable stock

3 teaspoons olive oil

12-14 fresh white mushrooms, brushed clean and coarsely chopped

1 large yellow onion, cut into 1-inch (2.5-cm) pieces

3 large carrots, cut into 1-inch (2.5-cm) pieces

2 celery stalks with leaves, cut into 1-inch pieces

6 cloves garlic, halved

8 cups water (64 fl oz/2L)

6 fresh flat-leaf (Italian) parsley sprigs

4 fresh thyme sprigs

1 bay leaf

1/8 teaspoon salt

1. In a stockpot, heat 2 teaspoons of the olive oil over medium-high heat.
2. Add the mushrooms and sauté until they begin to brown, 4 to 5 minutes.
3. Push the mushrooms to the side of the pot and add the remaining one teaspoon oil, the onion, the carrots, the celery, and the garlic.
4. Raise the heat to high and sauté, stirring often, until the vegetables are deeply browned, about 10 minutes - the browner the vegetables, the richer the flavor of the stock.
5. Add the water, parsley, thyme, bay leaf, and salt.
6. Bring to a boil, and then reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer, uncovered, for 25 to 30 minutes. Remove from the heat and let cool slightly.
7. Carefully strain the stock into a bowl through a colander or sieve lined with paper towels or cheesecloth (muslin).
8. Use right away or cover and refrigerate for up to three days, or freeze in airtight containers for up to three months.
9. Makes about 6 cups (48 fl oz/1.5 L). One cup contains 52 mg sodium.

Eating Away From Home

When you eat out, follow these tips to lower fat and sodium. Do not add salt to foods when you eat out. Consider the portion size of restaurant foods and share whenever possible. Look up nutritional facts on-line before you go out.

Appetizer

Choose: Fruit plates or cups or fresh vegetables plates.

Limit: Soup or tomato juice and fried or breaded appetizers.

Salads

Choose: Fruit or tossed salads with a dressing of vinegar, lemon juice, honey and oil, or a small amount of salad dressing.

Limit: Salad toppings, such as ham strips, cheese, bacon bits, or prepared salads, such as coleslaw, potato or pasta salad.

Meats

Choose: Plain and simply prepared turkey, chicken, fish, shellfish, beef, veal, or lamb.

Limit: Dishes with mixed food, such as pizza, lasagna, beef stroganoff, lobster, crab, breaded meats, and those in sauce or gravy.

Sandwiches

Choose: Those made with fresh sliced chicken, turkey, beef or pork, and also with seasonings allowed under a low-salt diet. See "Seasoning Herbs and Spices."

Limit: Meat-based salad filling, such as ham or tuna salad, breaded fish, or chicken, meat, and processed foods. For example, limit corned beef, hot dogs, bologna, ham, and cheese.

Vegetables

Choose: Fresh vegetables or unsalted frozen vegetables.

Limit: Salted vegetables and vegetable dishes served with cheese sauce or with cream sauces, such as creamed peas.

Starch

Choose: Baked, mashed or boiled potatoes without added salt, plain rice or pasta, most commercial breads, buns or rolls (white, French, rye, whole wheat), melba toast, unsalted-top crackers, or breadsticks.

Limit: Salted fried potatoes, au gratin potatoes, fried rice, pasta with cream sauce, salted bread sticks, and crackers.

Desserts

Choose: Fresh fruit, gelatin, fruit ice, sherbet, meringues, or plain cake.

Beverages

Choose: Regular or decaffeinated coffee or tea, milk, fruit juice, or carbonated soft drinks.

Limit: Tomato and V-8 juice, hot cocoa, and cocktail beverages.

Terms to watch for when eating out

If you need to restrict sodium, be cautious about foods described as:

- "Au jus" or "in broth." These terms can mean that the food is served with the juices obtained from cooking. Many restaurants use a commercial meat base that is high in sodium.
- "In cocktail sauce."
- "In tomato base."
- "Pickled."
- "Smoked."
- "Teriyaki."
- "Marinated."

Suggested menu for restaurant dining

When dining out, the following choices should keep you within your sodium and fat limit:

- Fresh fruit cup or fruit juice.
- Meat, fish or poultry with no added salt, breading or sauces.
- Roll, baked potato.
- Margarine.
- Salad with vinegar and oil dressing.
- Sherbet or gelatin.
- Low-fat milk.
- Coffee or tea.

Food Safety

Bacteria in your food can make you sick. Bacteria in food can spread when food is not prepared correctly. In order to help keep food safe, follow these safety measures:

- Wash hands with soap and water often as you prepare food.
- Keep your work area clean, washing it with hot, soapy water. Rinse well to remove the soap.
- Rinse and scrub fresh fruits and vegetables under running water before cutting or eating them.
- When shopping or when you make a meal, keep raw meat, poultry, fish and eggs away from ready-to-eat foods. Use separate cutting boards, utensils and platters.
- Thaw meat in the refrigerator. Store thawing meats below other food so drops from the meat will not contaminate other food.
- Cook food long enough and at a high enough temperature to kill harmful bacteria. Use a meat thermometer.

160 degrees Fahrenheit	Ground meats, chops, roasts and egg dishes
165 degrees Fahrenheit	Ground poultry, casseroles, leftovers and stuffing
165 degrees Fahrenheit	Chicken and turkey breast meat
165 degrees Fahrenheit	Whole birds, legs, thighs and wings

- Do not leave hot or cold foods at room temperature for more than two hours. Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold.

If you have questions about preparing food safely, ask your care team.

Conclusion

Keeping your body's sodium level in normal range can help support good health. If you have questions about controlling sodium intake or about any of this information, discuss them with your care team or registered dietitian.

Notes

Notes

Notes

This information is for your education only. It does not replace medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. New medical research or practices may change this information. If you have questions about a medical condition, talk with a member of your healthcare team.

Photographic images, if used, are copyright Mayo Clinic, Getty Images or Shutterstock.

BARBARA WOODWARD LIPS PATIENT EDUCATION CENTER

Mrs. Lips, a resident of San Antonio, Texas, was a loyal Mayo Clinic patient of more than 40 years and a self-made business leader who significantly expanded her family's activities in oil, gas and ranching. Upon her death in 1995, Mrs. Lips paid the ultimate compliment by leaving her entire estate to Mayo Clinic. By naming the Barbara Woodward Lips Patient Education Center, Mayo honors her generosity, her love of learning, her belief in patient empowerment and her dedication to high-quality care.

MAYO CLINIC | 200 First Street SW | Rochester, MN 55905 | mayoclinic.org

©2024 Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research. All rights reserved. MAYO, MAYO CLINIC and the triple-shield Mayo logo are trademarks and service marks of MFMER.

MC0932rev0524