

Tips to Help You Eat Less Sodium

For people with heart failure, limiting sodium intake is extremely important. Since sodium causes the body to retain fluid, the heart has to work harder. By using the tips in this pamphlet, you can cut down on sodium without cutting out taste from your diet.



How's Your Sodium Intake?

You might be surprised to learn how much sodium is in the foods you've been eating compared with the amount experts recommend.

If habits like these are everyday occurrences, you're probably getting too much sodium.

- Using salt during cooking
- Salting your food before tasting it
- Eating prepared snack foods like potato chips and salted nuts
- Eating canned or frozen foods that DON'T say "low salt" or "low sodium" on the label, including soups, fruits, and vegetables
- Eating dairy products that aren't fat-free, low-fat, or low-sodium

How Much Is Too Much?

For most people, the recommended intake of sodium (found in salt, baking powder, baking soda, and other ingredients in foods) is under 2,400 milligrams (mg) a day. This is just 1 teaspoon of salt. People with heart failure, though, should limit their sodium to **LESS THAN 2,000 mg a day.**

Why Not Just Cut Out Table Salt?

While reducing the use of table salt is one way to lower sodium intake, most people actually eat more sodium in convenience foods (such as prepackaged meats) and snacks (like popcorn) than in salt itself. So that's why you should cut down—or maybe cut out entirely—the high-sodium foods that many Americans eat (see boxed listing).

Simple Ways to Limit Sodium

- Remove the salt shaker from your table
- Don't use salt in cooking
- Talk with your doctor about using salt substitutes
- Substitute lemon juice, vinegar, or herbs for salt seasoning
- When using canned foods, drain and rinse them first
- Try fresh fruits and vegetables instead of processed, canned foods
- Choose canned vegetables with no salt added and brown or plain white rice instead of flavored versions

Is It Still Okay to Eat Canned and Packaged Foods?

Yes, as long as you read the labels to be sure these prepared and packaged foods are low in sodium. Watch for the words “soda” and “sodium” and the symbol “Na” on food labels—these tell you that forms of sodium have been added to the food. A product that claims it is “low-sodium” must have no more than 140 mg of sodium per serving.

High-Sodium Foods (Read the labels to find low-sodium forms)

Ham	Bacon	Sausage	Canned meats
Canned fish	Salted nuts	Peanut butter	Processed meats
Hot dogs	Pretzels	Potato chips	Olives
Cheese	Pickles	Gravy	Sauces
Preseasoned mixes (tacos, rices, chili)		Salad dressings	Fast food
Salted butter, margarine		Prepared mixes (pancake, muffin)	
Prepackaged frozen dinners*		Instant cooked cereals	

*Unless it has less than 400 mg of sodium per serving

Can I Eat Restaurant Food?

Yes, as long as you’re careful. Restaurant food is usually made with salt, so ask that dishes be prepared without salt. Become familiar with low-sodium foods, and look for them on menus. Reach for the pepper shaker instead of the salt shaker. And season fish and vegetables with fresh lemon juice instead of salt.

Since fast foods tend to be high in sodium, avoid the prepared items. Instead, choose a green salad, and skip the high-sodium salad dressing.

How Else Can I Cut Back on Sodium?

- Watch for the various forms of sodium on labels, such as sodium chloride, sodium sulfite, sodium caseinate, and monosodium glutamate (MSG)
- Talk to your doctor about the medicines you take for heartburn or headaches as these commonly contain sodium carbonate or bicarbonate

Remember

Take care with your heart health. Limit your sodium intake from foods so your heart doesn't have to work harder. Read food labels, choose more fresh fruits and vegetables, and avoid convenience and packaged foods that are high in sodium.