

Sodium and Your Diet

Sodium is found naturally in all foods. Salt is made from sodium. We need to eat only small amounts of sodium every day. Most Canadians eat more than two times as much sodium or salt than they need.

Too much sodium in your diet can make you thirsty and make your body hold on to fluid. If you have kidney, heart, or liver problems this extra fluid causes swelling, makes your heart work harder, and can make it harder to breathe. Eating less sodium can help manage these problems.

Eating less sodium can also help lower your blood pressure. Lower blood pressure helps lower your risk of heart disease, heart failure, stroke, and kidney disease.

Where does sodium come from?

Most of the sodium and salt we eat comes from processed and packaged foods, and restaurant foods. Sodium also comes from the salt we add at the table or in cooking.

Aim to eat **less than 2300 milligrams (mg) of sodium per day**. The closer you can get to 1500 mg per day, the better. This includes the sodium in food and the salt you add in cooking and at the table.

Getting used to a low salt diet takes time. When you first cut back on salt and salty foods in your diet, foods may taste bland. Over time, your taste buds get used to the taste of less salt. Some foods, especially processed and restaurant foods, will taste too salty.

Tips to lower your sodium intake

- Don't add salt to your food while cooking or at the table.
- Flavour your food with herbs, spices, garlic, onion, lemon juice, vinegar, and salt-free seasonings like Mrs. Dash®.
- Choose fresh, unprocessed, and homemade foods more often.
- Eat less processed, packaged, or restaurant foods.
- Limit condiments that are high in sodium such as ketchup, mustard, soy sauce, gravies, and salad dressings.
- Limit pickled foods, olives, salsa, chutneys, and dips.
- Read food labels and buy brands with less sodium per serving.

Caution: Ask your doctor, pharmacist, or dietitian before using a salt substitute like No Salt® or Half Salt®. Some have potassium, which is a problem if you have kidney disease or other health conditions.

Reading food labels

Reading food labels makes it easier to cut back on sodium. There are three places on a food label where you can find information about sodium:

1. The ingredient list

- Sodium can be called “salt”, “sodium”, or “soda” in the ingredient list.
- Ingredients are listed from most to least. Choose foods that have sodium listed near the end of the list.
- Ingredients that include the word “sodium”, such as monosodium glutamate or sodium nitrite, have sodium in them. Choose foods that have these ingredients near the end of the list.

2. The Nutrition Facts table

- Foods with a sodium % Daily Value higher than 15% are high in sodium. Choose these less often.
- Compare brands. Choose foods with lower % Daily Value and smaller amounts of sodium. Look for foods with 5% Daily Value or lower.
- Look for foods with less than 200 mg of sodium per serving of food.
- All the information in the table is based on the serving size at the top of the table. If you eat more or less than the listed serving size, you need to adjust the amounts of nutrients listed. For example, in the table below, if you ate ½ cup (125 mL), you would get 50 mg of sodium.

Nutrition Facts	
Per 1 cup (250 mL)	
Amount	% Daily Value
Calories 150	0%
Fat 0 g	0%
Cholesterol 5 mg	
Sodium 100 mg	4%
Carbohydrate 29 g	10%
Fibre 0 g	0%
Sugars 26 g	
Protein 6 g	

3. Low sodium label claims

Look for foods labelled as “sodium-free”, “low sodium”, or “reduced sodium”. Reduced sodium does not always mean the food is low in sodium. Also check the Nutrition Facts table for sodium amounts.

For people following a kidney diet

Foods labelled “salt-free”, “no added salt”, or “low sodium” may have potassium and/or phosphorus added to replace the sodium.

- Check the Nutrition Facts table for the amount of sodium and potassium.
- Check the ingredient list for additives with phosphorus or potassium. Limit or avoid foods with these additives.

The Nutrition Facts table does not always list the amount of potassium in foods. Potassium that is naturally found in some foods may not appear on the table (for example, orange juice).

Use the food lists below to help you cut down on the sodium you eat every day.

	Choose	Limit or avoid
Vegetables and Fruit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vegetables and fruit, fresh, frozen, or dried • Vegetables, canned with no added salt • Tomatoes, canned with no added salt • 100% fruit juices <p>If you need to follow a low potassium diet, choose low potassium vegetables and fruit. Ask your dietitian which of these foods are right for you.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • French fries, hash browns, and potato chips, salted • Sauerkraut • Potatoes, from a mix • Tomato juice, vegetable juice, and vegetable cocktail • Tomato sauce, pasta sauce, and salsa • Vegetables, canned with salt • Vegetables, frozen, with cream or tomato sauce
Grain Products	<p>Choose foods with the lowest sodium amounts for the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baked goods, homemade, such as muffins, pancakes, or waffles, made without added salt • Breads, buns, bagels, pitas, English muffins • Barley, bulgur, millet, oats, quinoa, rye • Rice cakes, crackers and cookies, unsalted • Cold cereals and hot cereals (not instant) • Pasta, couscous • Rice, brown rice <p>If you need to follow a low phosphorus diet, ask your dietitian which of these foods are right for you.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baked goods from dry mixes • Baked goods, restaurant, or store-bought • Rice cakes and crackers, salted, or seasoned • Hot cereals, instant, with higher than 15% Daily Value • Pasta, rice or noodles that are canned, instant, or from a mix such as Kraft Dinner[®], Rice-a-Roni[®], Lipton's Sidekicks[®] • Stuffing mixes
Milk Alternatives	<p>Choose brands with the lowest sodium amounts for the following foods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Milk, skim, 1%, 2%, or soy beverages • Cheeses, small amounts of hard cheeses such as cheddar, mozzarella, marble, Swiss • Cheeses, soft, such as cream cheese, Brie, ricotta • Cottage cheese, no salt added • Yogurt or kefir <p>If you need to follow a low phosphorus diet, ask your dietitian how much of these foods are right for you.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cheese slices or spreads (for example, Cheez Whiz[®]), processed • Cheese, some higher in sodium: blue, feta, Parmesan • Cottage cheese, regular • Pudding or custard, instant mixes • Buttermilk

	Choose	Limit or avoid
Meat and Alternatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beans, peas, and lentils, dried, cooked without salt. Rinse canned products. • Eggs • Meat, fish, or poultry, fresh • Nuts and nut butter, unsalted • Tofu • Tuna or salmon, canned, no salt added <p>If you need to follow a low phosphorus diet, ask your dietitian how much of these foods are right for you.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meat, poultry, fish, canned with salt • Meat, poultry, fish, breaded or seasoned • Nuts, salted • Processed meat such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bacon • bologna • corned beef • deli meat (chicken, turkey, and roast beef) • ham • hotdogs/wieners • pepperoni • sardines • salami • sausages • smokies
Spices, seasonings, and condiments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gravies, sauces and dips, homemade without salt • Herbs and spices with no salt added such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • basil • black pepper • cardamom • cayenne pepper • chili oil • cinnamon • cumin • dry mustard • garlic, fresh or powder • ginger • mint • onion, fresh or powder • parsley • paprika • rosemary • tarragon • thyme • turmeric • Lemon or lime juice, vinegar • No added salt seasonings such as Mrs. Dash[®], Spike[®], or McCormick[®] • Tabasco sauce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sea salt, table salt • Spices or seasoning mixes that have salt or sodium, such as seasoning salt, garlic salt, onion salt, celery salt, lemon pepper, sea salt, channa masala, chat masala, meat masala, tandoori masala • Pre-made, packaged gravies, sauces, and dips • Bacon fat • Canned or packaged broth, bouillon cubes, or consommé • Condiments such as mustard, ketchup, relish, tartar sauce, salad dressings, and mayonnaise (limit to 1 Tbsp (15 mL) per day) • Salsa, pickles, olives • Sauces such as steak sauce, BBQ sauce, marinating sauces, soy, teriyaki, hoisin, black bean, or fish sauce • Breading mixes such as Shake n' Bake[®]
Other foods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-hydrogenated margarine (unsalted) and vegetable oils. Use small amounts. • Soups, homemade (you can control the amount of sodium/salt added) • Check the sodium amounts on labels of unsalted snacks such as pretzels, tortilla chips, rice cakes, some microwave popcorn, air popped popcorn. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fast foods and restaurant foods • Snack foods such as salted chips, nachos, pretzels, popcorn, bhujia, and crackers • Soups, canned or dried such as Cup-O-Soup[®], oriental noodle mixes • Casserole mixes such as Hamburger Helper[®] • Frozen, deli, or take-out meals