

# Low Sodium (2,000 mg) Diet



## What is sodium?

Sodium is a mineral that is needed for good health and is present in most foods. Most people eat more sodium than they need. Sodium is part of salt. Therefore, if you need to limit your sodium, you need to limit how much salt you eat.

If the body cannot get rid of the extra sodium, fluid builds up. Extra fluid increases the work of the heart and kidneys, and may increase blood pressure. Some health conditions like liver disease, heart disease, and kidney failure are affected greatly by this extra fluid. Eating less sodium may help control these problems.

To help protect your health, **limit sodium to no more than 2,000 milligrams (mg) per day**. The purpose of a low sodium diet is not to get rid of sodium completely. Your body needs at least 500 mg of sodium a day to maintain normal fluid balance and optimal function of nerves, muscles, and organs. This handout will teach you how to make lower sodium food choices to bring your sodium intake into a healthier range. However, remember that just because a food is low sodium does not mean it is healthy. For example, bacon may have less sodium than a bagel, but that does not mean you should eat bacon without limits, as it is high in fats that are not heart healthy. **A low sodium diet focuses on eating vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, lean proteins, and unsaturated fats.** Please ask your dietitian if you have any questions.

## Sources of sodium

The sodium in our diet comes from 3 main sources:

- **Table salt**, also called NaCl or sodium chloride, is the most common source of sodium in our diet. **1 teaspoon of salt has 2,300 mg of sodium.** Remember, your daily limit is 2,000 mg, which is less than 1 teaspoon of salt per day.
- **Processed foods** have large amounts of sodium. These include easy to prepare box mixes, frozen dinners, luncheon meats, and many canned items. Examples of canned items include foods like soups, vegetables, pork and beans, and tomato products. Many people do not know that processed foods like ready to eat cereals, breads, and baked goods also can be high in sodium. Read a product's food label to check the amount of sodium it has per serving.
- **Small amounts of sodium occur naturally in most foods.** Only 12% of your sodium intake comes from what is naturally found in foods. Unsalted, unprocessed foods usually have low sodium content. Most foods in your diet should come from this group. Examples are listed in this handout.



Other sources of sodium you might not think of:

Many non-prescription drugs (antacids, laxatives, aspirin, cough medicines, etc.) and mouthwashes have sodium. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for more information. Water softening equipment will add a large amount of sodium to the water.

## Sodium guidelines

To choose foods that are healthier for you, look for these labels:

- **Sodium free** – less than 5 mg of sodium per serving
- **Very low sodium** – 35 mg or less per serving
- **Low sodium** – 140 mg or less per serving

**Remember, reduced sodium and unsalted products still have salt in them!** While reduced sodium and unsalted products are always preferred to the original product, remember that they might not be truly low in sodium.

- **Reduced sodium** – Usual sodium level is reduced by 25%. Products with this label may not always be low in sodium. For example, if the original product contains 1,000 mg of sodium, the reduced sodium version will have 750 mg, which is still very high in sodium.
- **Unsalted** – Made without salt, but still has the sodium that's a natural part of the food. For example, even if you buy unsalted pretzels, they will still have some sodium content, so do not forget to count it in your daily allowance.

## Know your salt

When you are on a very low sodium diet, even a small amount of salt has a lot of sodium in it.

Amount of Sodium in Salt	
¼ teaspoon salt	600 mg of sodium
½ teaspoon salt	1,200 mg of sodium
¾ teaspoon salt	1,800 mg of sodium
1 teaspoon salt	2,300 mg of sodium
1 teaspoon baking soda	1,000 mg of sodium

## General guidelines

- **Do not** add salt to your foods when cooking or at the table.
- **Avoid** seasoned salts. These include onion salt, celery salt, “lite” salt, “low sodium” salt, and “sea salt.” Accent (MSG), meat tenderizers, and lemon pepper should also be avoided. Common brands of salted seasonings include Lawry’s and McCormick Grill Mates. Always read food labels on seasonings to make sure they do not contain sodium.
- **Be careful** if you choose a salt substitute. Many substitutes have large amounts of potassium in them, which can cause medical problems for some people. “Lite salts” contain sodium in smaller amounts, but are still too high for people who need to restrict sodium. Ask your doctor or dietitian if a salt substitute is okay for you.

- **Learn how to read food labels** to make good low sodium choices. Ingredients are listed by weight, in order from highest to lowest. Words that suggest a food is high in sodium include salt, baking powder, brine, or any additive that says the word “sodium.” Look for the words monosodium glutamate or disodium phosphate on the label and avoid these items.

**An important note about processed foods:**

- Many fat reduced or calorie reduced products are not lower in sodium than the regular product. In fact, many times they are higher. Examples of this include turkey ham and turkey bacon. When processed foods are used, read the food label to make a smart choice.
- Once sodium is in a food, it cannot easily be taken out. Rinsing or boiling meats and other foods, like sauerkraut or canned vegetables, does not significantly decrease the sodium content. It is best to avoid these products unless they are salt free.
- Restaurant foods are often very high in sodium. Very few restaurant foods are appropriate for a low sodium diet. Ask your dietitian for the handout “Restaurant Rehab: Using the Menu to Make Heart Healthy Choices” or visit [go.osu.edu/pted1291](http://go.osu.edu/pted1291) for tips on how to reduce sodium when eating out.

Food Type	Foods Allowed	Foods Not Allowed
<b>Meat, Fish and Poultry</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 ounces (oz) daily of any fresh meat, fish, or poultry prepared with allowed seasonings (beef, chicken, Cornish hen, duck, goose, lamb, turkey, veal, filet fish, and fresh pork)</li> <li>• Low sodium canned tuna fish</li> <li>• Processed meats that have less than 200 mg per 2 oz</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All smoked, cured, salted or pickled meat, fish, and poultry (bacon, corned beef, hot dogs, ham, sardines, herring, processed boned and rolled poultry and meat)</li> <li>• Cold cuts</li> <li>• Sausage</li> <li>• Frozen meat, fish, or poultry that have breading or gravy</li> <li>• Shellfish (clams, crab, lobster, oysters, and scallops)</li> </ul>
<b>Vegetables</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All fresh, frozen, or canned without salt</li> <li>• Salt free tomato and vegetable juices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular canned vegetables</li> <li>• Sauerkraut, pickles, and other vegetables prepared in salt water</li> <li>• Vegetables frozen in sauces and gravies</li> <li>• Tomato and vegetable juices</li> <li>• Onion rings</li> </ul>
<b>Fruits</b>	All fruits allowed	
<b>Cereals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dry cereals that have no more than 100 mg per serving</li> <li>• Cooked cereals prepared without salt</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dry cereals that have more than 100 mg per serving</li> <li>• Instant cooked cereals</li> </ul>

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<p><b>Beverages</b></p> <p>* Follow the instructions of your health care provider if you are to limit your fluids.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water</li> <li>• Carbonated beverages, coffee, decaffeinated coffee, tea, fruit juices, and drinks</li> <li>• Unsalted tomato and vegetable juices</li> <li>• Alcohol in moderation (check with your doctor first)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gatorade and other high sodium sports drinks</li> <li>• Regular tomato and vegetable juices</li> <li>• Instant cocoa mixes</li> </ul>
<p><b>Breads</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Up to 4 slices enriched white, rye, Italian, or wheat bread a day. If more than 4 slices of bread a day are desired, the additional bread must be salt free. Look for breads that have less than 150 mg of sodium per slice.</li> <li>• Salt free bread as desired</li> <li>• Plain rolls, hamburger buns, or hot dog buns may be substituted for 1 slice of bread serving, if made with low sodium baking powder and no salt</li> <li>• Biscuits, cornbread, pancakes, quick breads, muffins, and waffles can be substituted for bread (if made with low sodium baking powder and no salt)</li> <li>• Low sodium crackers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bagels</li> <li>• Rolls with salted tops</li> <li>• Regular, frozen, or commercial mixes of biscuits, cornbread, pancakes, quick breads, muffins, and waffles</li> <li>• Crackers with salted tops, cheese crackers, or other flavored snack crackers</li> <li>• Snack crackers with unsalted tops</li> </ul>
<p><b>Potatoes and Starches</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• White potatoes, sweet potatoes, red potatoes</li> <li>• ½ cup instant mashed potatoes with less than 75 mg per serving and no added salt</li> <li>• Unsalted French fries</li> <li>• Spaghetti, macaroni, hominy, or noodles</li> <li>• White, brown, or wild rice</li> <li>• Homemade dressing or stuffing with allowed ingredients</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boxed mixes, frozen, or store prepared potato products (scalloped potatoes, au gratin potatoes, hash browns, German potato salad, creamed potatoes, and salted French fried potatoes)</li> <li>• Rice and noodle side dish mixes</li> <li>• Stuffing and dressing mixes</li> </ul>

Food Type	Foods Allowed	Foods Not Allowed
<b>Cheese</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low sodium cheese which has less than 80 mg sodium per ounce</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regular cottage cheese, regular aged cheeses (bleu cheese, cheddar, Colby, Edam, longhorn, Limburger, mozzarella, Parmesan, ricotta, and Romano)</li> <li>Processed cheese and cheese spreads (American cheese, Velveeta, or Cheese Whiz)</li> </ul>
<b>Milk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No more than 2 cups of milk per day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Avoid buttermilk, commercial milkshakes, and malted milk</li> </ul>
<b>Fats</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vegetable oils and shortening</li> <li>Homemade salad dressings made with allowed ingredients</li> <li>Bottled unsalted salad dressings</li> <li>2 teaspoons of unsalted butter or margarine daily</li> <li>No more than 2 tablespoons of mayonnaise a day</li> <li>No more than 2 oz of sweet or sour cream per day</li> <li>Gravy and sauces made with allowed ingredients</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bacon or other salted pork fats</li> <li>Commercial salad dressings</li> <li>Packaged and canned gravies and sauces</li> </ul>
<b>Desserts and Sweets</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 serving of a dessert per day (unless your doctor or dietitian tell you otherwise)</li> <li>Desserts include: cake, cookies, custard, donuts, sweet rolls, ice cream, sherbet, pie, brownies and pudding made with allowed ingredients</li> <li>Sodium free desserts as desired</li> <li>Sugar, corn and maple syrup, honey, jelly, jam, marmalade, preserves, marshmallows, and plain hard or soft candy such as jellybeans, gumdrops, lemon drops, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Molasses, candy, or desserts made with peanut butter or salted nuts, peanut brittle, instant cocoa mixes, and licorice</li> <li>Salted caramel or any dessert with added salt</li> </ul>

Food Type	Foods Allowed	Foods Not Allowed
<b>Snack Foods</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unsalted snack chips as desired (corn chips, tortilla chips, pretzels, potato chips, popcorn)</li> <li>• Unsalted nuts</li> <li>• Salsa made with allowed ingredients (salt free tomatoes, etc.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any salted snack chips (corn chips, tortilla chips, pretzels, potato chips, popcorn (regular and microwave), and cheese popcorn)</li> <li>• Salted nuts</li> <li>• Party spreads and dips, bean dip, and commercial salsa</li> </ul>
<b>Frozen Dinners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choose from those containing less than 600 mg per serving. Keep in mind that this is over ¼ of your daily intake so choose other foods for your day carefully!</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most frozen meals</li> </ul>
<b>Soups</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unsalted homemade soups and unsalted canned soups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular canned soups, or dried or instant soup mixes</li> <li>• Frozen soups</li> <li>• Broth, bouillon cubes, granules, or powder, or consommé</li> <li>• Homemade soups made with added salt, ham, ham bones, salted fish, or salty meat</li> <li>• Low sodium canned soups, including “less sodium” soups</li> </ul>
<b>Sauces and Seasonings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Herbs, spices, lemon juice, vinegar, wine (except cooking wine or cooking sherry), or herb blends that do not contain sodium (ex. Mrs. Dash)</li> <li>• Up to 1 tablespoon ketchup or 1 teaspoon prepared mustard per day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chili sauce, barbecue sauce, relishes, soy sauce, teriyaki sauce, tamari sauce, Worcestershire sauce, horseradish prepared with salt, steak sauce, oyster sauce, miso paste, and MSG</li> </ul>

Ask your dietitian or other health care provider for these handouts to help you follow a low sodium diet:

- “Making Sense Out of Food Labels” or visit [go.osu.edu/pted1173](https://go.osu.edu/pted1173)
- “Low Sodium 3-Day Sample Menu” or visit [go.osu.edu/pted4335](https://go.osu.edu/pted4335)

**This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.**

For more health information, go to [wexnermedical.osu.edu/patiented](https://wexnermedical.osu.edu/patiented) or contact the Library for Health Information at 614-293-3707 or [health-info@osu.edu](mailto:health-info@osu.edu).