

What is sodium?

Sodium is a mineral that your body needs. It affects blood pressure and the amount of water held in your body. It is important that your body has the right amount of sodium.

Many foods and beverages have sodium, but the main source in your diet is table salt. Your doctor has asked you to follow a low-sodium diet. This factsheet will help you know how much sodium you get.

What is a low-sodium diet?

On a low-sodium diet, you should have less than 2,000 mg (or 2 grams) of sodium in your food each day. Do not add salt when cooking or at mealtime. Avoid foods high in sodium. A list of low-sodium and high-sodium foods can be found on the next page.

What about prepared foods?

Read the Nutrition Facts food label on the prepared or packaged foods you eat. Check the serving size shown near the top of the label and note the total sodium in each serving. Follow the instructions in the column on the right to figure how much sodium you are getting. If you have questions about a food or beverage, please ask your dietitian.

Tips for cutting back on sodium

- Choose foods with 140 milligrams (mg) of sodium or less per serving.
- Choose fresh foods, which are lower in sodium than processed foods.
- Use less salt at the table and when cooking. One teaspoon of table salt has 2,300 mg of sodium.
- Always check the nutrition label. Just because a food is labeled “unsalted” or “reduced sodium” doesn’t mean it is low in sodium.

Tips for flavoring without sodium

- Talk to your doctor before using salt substitutes such as Mrs. Dash. They are not a good option for everyone.
- Other ways to flavor food include the following:
 - Fresh lemon or lime juice, or vinegar
 - Chopped fresh or dried herbs
 - Fresh ground pepper or red pepper flakes
 - Finely chopped onion, ginger, or garlic

How to figure the amount of sodium using Nutrition Facts food labels

1. Check the serving size. (See **1** below.)
2. Look at how much “Sodium” is in each serving. (See **2** below.)
3. Count how many servings you want to eat.
4. Take the “Sodium” number from the food label (**2**) and multiply it by how many servings you are eating. The number is your total milligrams of sodium.

Example

Nutrition Facts	
4 servings per container	
1 → Serving size	1 cup (228 g)
Amount Per Serving	
Calories	230
	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 8g	10%
Saturated Fat 1g	5%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
2 → Sodium 160mg	8%
Total Carbohydrate 37mg	12%
Dietary Fiber 4g	14%
Total Sugars 12g	
Protein 3g	

Sample food label

- You want to eat 2 cups of this food.
Two cups = 2 servings
- Each serving has 160 milligrams of sodium.
2 servings x 160 milligrams of sodium = 320 milligrams of sodium
- Your total amount of sodium for this food is 320 milligrams.

Add all of the sodium for the food you eat throughout the day. **Be careful not to eat more than 2,000 milligrams of sodium in one day.**

The lists below can help you choose what foods to eat on a low-sodium diet.

ENJOY these low-sodium foods:		AVOID these high-sodium foods:	
Grains	Oats, grits, and cream of wheat Plain pasta, quinoa, rice Unsalted popcorn Corn tortillas	Grains	Biscuits, corn bread, and other “quick” breads prepared with baking soda Pre-packaged bread crumbs Pre-seasoned rice and pasta Self-rising flours
Proteins	Fresh meat and fish Canned tuna (limit to 4 ounces or less at a time) Dried beans and peas Canned beans and peas, rinsed Soybeans and tofu Eggs Unsalted nuts and nut butters	Proteins	Cured meats: Bacon, ham, sausage, pepperoni, hot dogs Canned meats (chili, Spam, Vienna sausage, sardines) Smoked fish and meats
Dairy	Milk and milk powder Plant milks such as rice and soy Yogurt and Greek yogurt Cream cheese	Dairy	Buttermilk Processed cheese spreads American or feta cheese Shredded cheese String cheese
Vegetables	Fresh and frozen vegetables without sauces or added salt	Vegetables	Seasoned or sauced frozen vegetables Sauerkraut and pickled vegetables French fries and onion rings
Fruit	Fresh and canned fruit	Fruit	Olives
Oils	Tub or liquid margarine Canola, corn, peanut, olive, safflower, sunflower oils	Oils	Salted butter or margarine
Condiments	Fresh or dried herbs Vinegars Lemon and lime juice Pepper, red pepper flakes, cayenne Hot sauce in very small quantities	Condiments	All salt (including onion and garlic salts) Bouillon cubes Barbecue and Worcestershire sauces Jarred salsa and relish Soy sauce

CHECK THE LABELS (low-sodium options available)			
Prepared Foods	Frozen meals Canned or dried soups	Vegetables	Canned vegetables
Grains	Breads, bagels, pretzels, and crackers Hot and cold cereals	Fruit	Dried fruit
Dairy	Cottage cheese Block cheeses	Condiments	Ketchup Salad dressings Seasoning mixes and marinades