Fred Hutch Cancer Center

Medical Nutrition Therapy Services

Correcting Low Sodium and Free Water Restriction

What is sodium?

Sodium is an element that your body needs in order to function properly. Your body uses sodium to regulate blood pressure and blood volume. Sodium is also critical for proper muscle and nerve function.

How can sodium get too low?

Blood sodium levels can become low from:

- Side effects of certain medications or diseases.
- Drinking large volumes of fluids that are low in sodium.
- Diarrhea.

Normal sodium level is between 136-145 mEq/dL.

Your sodium level was _____ mEq/dL on _____.

What can I do to increase my sodium level?

- Change what you drink to increase your sodium levels. Drink more high sodium (salty) beverages and drink fewer low sodium beverages to raise blood sodium levels. Follow the fluid guidelines below.
- You can increase sodium in your beverages by adding salt. For example, adding ¼ teaspoon will raise the sodium in your beverage by 575 mg. 1 teaspoon of salt contains 2300 mg sodium.
- Adding excessive amounts of salt to food will not correct a low blood sodium level.

High sodium fluids Drink any amount of these high sodium fluids each day		
• Broth • Soups	• Tomato juice • V-8® juice	
Medium sodium fluids You may drink up to _____ cups of these medium sodium fluids each day:		
• Buttermilk • Chocolate milk • Cocoa (made with milk)	• Eggnog • Milk (all varieties: cow, almond, soy)	• Reduced sodium broth/soup
Low sodium fluids* Limit intake to _____cups of these low sodium fluids each day:		
• Coffee • Fruit juices/drinks/nectars • Cocoa (made with water)	• Lemonade • Popsicles • Sherbet/sorbet	• Tea • Water • Soda

*Free water describes fluids with minimal to no sodium content. You may be on a "Free water restriction" to correct low sodium levels. These fluids are listed under "Low Sodium Fluids".

Resources

National Institute of Health, Medline Plus: nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/002415.htm

This education resource was intended to be given as a part of a nutrition consult by a Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center dietitian. Questions? Ask a Fred Hutch dietitian at nutrition@seattlecca.org