

Eating a Low-Salt Diet

Making it work for you

This handout explains how to follow the low-salt diet your doctor prescribed.

Why do I need a low-salt diet?

Your doctor has prescribed a low-salt (low-sodium) diet for you. This may be because you have high blood pressure, kidney disease, or heart problems. On this diet, you will need to reduce your sodium intake to 1,500 milligrams (mg) a day.

We suggest that you meet with a registered dietitian to learn more about this diet. Ask your doctor for a referral to see a dietitian from UWMC's Food and Nutrition Services. Check with your insurance company to see if it covers visits with a dietitian.

Most foods naturally contain some sodium, and many processed foods contain a lot of added salt. Added salt is the main source of sodium in our diets. You must avoid many foods to keep your sodium intake below 1,500 mg a day.

Basic Guidelines

- Do **not** add salt when you prepare food.
- Do **not** add salt to food after it is prepared.
- Do **not** use salt substitutes.
- Use herbs and spices for flavoring. See page 2 for seasonings and sauces to avoid.

Read Food Labels Carefully

- Salt is often added to processed foods. Check the Nutrition Facts on the label to see how much sodium is in 1 serving.



The Nutrition Facts label on packaged foods shows the total sodium grams contained in 1 serving of the product.

- Also read the ingredients list. If the food contains “sodium,” “soda,” “salt,” or “brine,” check with your provider before eating it.
- Be aware that labeling such as “lite” or “light” may be misleading. These words only mean the product has less of a certain ingredient compared to the regular product.
- “Lite salt” contains less sodium than regular table salt, but it still is high in sodium. It is not allowed on a sodium-restricted diet.

Other Products to Avoid

Medicines

- Alkalizer tablets or powder such as seltzer or bicarbonate of soda (baking soda)
- Cough medicines*
- Laxatives*
- Mineral waters*
- Pain relievers and sedatives*

**Rely on your provider to prescribe these.*

Seasonings and Sauces

- Baking powder
- Monosodium glutamate (MSG)
- Baking soda
- Meat tenderizer
- Onion flakes
- Any kind of salt: celery, garlic, lite, onion, or seasoned
- Barbeque sauce
- Catsup
- Chili
- Horseradish
- Kitchen Bouquet seasoning
- Meat sauce
- Mustard
- Pickle relish
- Soy sauce
- Worcestershire sauce

Label Terms

Here are meanings for some terms you may see on food labels:

- *Unsalted* = No salt added during processing
- *Reduced sodium* = At least 75% less sodium than the food normally has
- *Low sodium* = 140 mg of sodium or less per serving
- *Very low sodium* = 35 mg of sodium or less per serving
- *Sodium-free* = Less than 5 mg of sodium per serving

What to Eat and What to Avoid on a Low-Salt Diet

Food	OK	Avoid
Breads <i>OK to eat 1 to 2 slices of regular bread a day (any extra slices must be low-sodium)</i>	Bread and rolls prepared without salt, baking powder, or baking soda Unsalted crackers, Holland Rusk, and zwieback	Regular bread and rolls prepared with salt, baking powder, or baking soda Salted crackers and graham crackers
Cereals	Unsalted cooked cereals, regular puffed wheat, puffed rice, shredded wheat, other low-sodium dry cereals	All other dry cereals, instant and quick-cooking cream of wheat, farina, hominy grits
Cheese	Low-sodium cheese, low-sodium cottage cheese	All other cheeses
Desserts <i>OK to have 1 serving a day of regular dessert</i>	Ice cream, sherbet, pudding (as part of milk allowance), gelatin, low-sodium baked goods	Instant pudding and other desserts made with salt, baking powder, or baking soda
Drinks	Milk (if allowed), tea, coffee, fruit juices, carbonated drinks (<i>no more than 12 oz. of carbonated drinks a day</i>)	Vegetable juices that contain salt
Fat <i>OK to have 2 teaspoons regular fat a day (any extra must be low-sodium)</i>	Unsalted fats: butter, margarine, salad oil, sour cream, salad dressing, mayonnaise, lard, shortening, salt-free peanut butter	Regular butter and margarine, commercial salted salad dressings and mayonnaise, bacon drippings, regular peanut butter

Food	OK	Avoid
Fruits	Fresh, frozen, and canned fruits and fruit juices	Dried fruits preserved with sodium no more than ½ cup a day
Meat, Fish, Poultry, Eggs <i>OK to have 1 serving of meat, fish, poultry, or egg, if prepared without salt</i>	Fresh or frozen meat, poultry, or fish without added salt or seasoning mixtures that contain sodium Fresh oysters, clams, and shrimp	Meat, fish, or poultry with added salt or seasoning mixtures with sodium Smoked and salt-cured meats: ham, bacon, hot dogs, sausage, cold cuts Fish frozen with salt, canned tuna and salmon, other shellfish
Milk <i>OK to have 3 cups a day</i>	Skim, whole, 2%, chocolate, cocoa from low-sodium mix, evaporated	Cultured buttermilk, malted, condensed, milk mixes
Other Foods	Sugar, syrup, jelly, jam, marmalade, maple syrup, honey, hard candy, spices and herbs on allowed list (see pages 5 and 6), lemon juice, vinegar, unsalted nuts, cocoa powder, unsalted catsup, unsalted mustard	Molasses, candy with added salt or sodium compounds, salt-based spices, pickles, relish, olives, salted nuts and popcorn, catsup, mustard, prepared sauces and gravy, artificial sweeteners that contain sodium, chewing tobacco
Starches	Fresh, frozen, and canned white or sweet potatoes without added salt or seasoning mixtures that contain sodium Rice, macaroni, spaghetti, noodles	Potato chips, corn chips with salt or sodium compounds added, salted shoestring potatoes, and frozen potato products with salt or seasoning mixtures that contain sodium
Soups	Low-sodium broth or soup made with allowed milk and vegetables	All commercial broth, soup, bouillon, or consommé (powdered, canned, or frozen)
Vegetables <i>No more than 1 serving a day of carrots, spinach, celery, or beets</i>	All other fresh, frozen, or canned vegetables and vegetable juices without added salt or seasoning mixtures that contain sodium	Canned vegetables and vegetable juices that are canned with salt, frozen peas and lima beans, tomato puree, sauerkraut, tomato sauce

Cooking without Salt

Here are some simple tips for adding flavor to foods without adding salt:

- Add lemon juice or vinegar to cooked vegetables.
- Mix seasonings with unsalted butter, margarine, or oil to put on foods before serving.
- Add whole spices at the beginning of cooking. Add ground spices 15 minutes before the end of cooking.

Add Spices and Herbs to Your Foods

Try these spices and herbs instead of salt to flavor your foods:

Spice/Herb	Add to
<i>Allspice</i>	Meat, fish, eggs, fruit, peas
<i>Anise seed</i>	Sweet breads, fruit, carrots, beets, cottage cheese, cookies
<i>Basil</i>	Meat, fish, eggs, vegetables, rice, salads
<i>Bay leaf</i>	Meat, fish, stews, beans
<i>Caraway</i>	Bread, cottage cheese, meat, vegetables, rice
<i>Cardamom</i>	Baked goods, fruit, soups
<i>Chili powder</i>	Meatloaf, chicken, cheese, corn, eggplant, eggs
<i>Chives</i>	Salads, cottage cheese, egg dishes
<i>Cinnamon</i>	Baked goods, fruit, pork, lamb, chicken, carrots
<i>Cloves</i>	Fruit, baked goods, fish, pot roast, green beans, beets, carrots
<i>Coriander</i>	Pastry, cookies, meat, salads, cheese
<i>Cumin</i>	Grains, beans, meatloaf, fish, cheese, eggs, cabbage, fruit pie
<i>Curry powder</i>	Meat, lentils, cottage cheese, poultry, vegetables, fish, salad, bread
<i>Fennel seed</i>	Bread, cookies, apples, pork, eggs, fish, beets, cabbage, cheese
<i>Garlic</i>	Salads, soups, meat, poultry, fish, bread, butter
<i>Ginger</i>	Fruit, vegetables, baked goods, meat, fish, poultry
<i>Horseradish</i>	Meat, vegetables, butter, margarine
<i>Lemon or lime juice</i>	Vegetables, fruit, baked goods, fish, tea
<i>Mace</i>	Baked goods, fruit, vegetables, fish, poultry

Spice/Herb	Add to
<i>Marjoram</i>	Meat, chicken, fish, vegetables, breads, green salads
<i>Mint</i>	Lamb, vegetables, carrots, cabbage, some desserts, sherbet, tea
<i>Mustard</i>	Cheese, eggs, meat, vegetables, poultry
<i>Nutmeg</i>	Baked goods, fruit, chicken, eggs, vegetables, winter squash
<i>Onion powder</i>	Meat, fish, poultry, soups, vegetables, cheese, eggs, bread, rice, salads
<i>Oregano</i>	Pasta, eggs, cheese, onions, pork, lamb, fish, chicken, vegetables, salads
<i>Paprika</i>	Meat, fish, poultry, eggs, cheese, vegetables
<i>Pepper</i>	Meat, fish, poultry, vegetables, eggs
<i>Poultry seasoning</i>	Poultry, veal
<i>Rosemary</i>	Lamb, poultry, meat, fish, vegetables, eggs, bread
<i>Sage</i>	Meat, fish, poultry, eggplant
<i>Tarragon</i>	Meat, fish, poultry, vegetables
<i>Thyme</i>	Meat, fish, poultry, vegetables
<i>Vinegar</i>	Salads, cooked vegetables

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

- **To set up a clinic visit**, call the Otolaryngology/ Head and Neck Surgery Center at 206.598.4022 and press 8 to speak to the front desk.

- **If you are already a patient** and have questions about your treatment plan:

Weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., call the Otology Voice Mail Line at 206.598.7519.

After hours and on weekends and holidays, call 206.598.4022 and press 5 when you hear the recording. This will connect you with a nurse on the Community Care Line.

Recipe for Sodium-Free Baking Powder

It is easy to make your own sodium-free baking powder. You can buy these ingredients from your local drugstore or pharmacist:

- Tartaric acid: 7.5 grams
- Potassium bitartrate: 56.1 grams
- Potassium bicarbonate: 39.8 grams
- Cornstarch: 28 grams

Use 1½ teaspoons low-sodium baking powder for each teaspoon of regular baking powder. When you use it in baked goods, add it toward the end of mixing time. Stir gently, only enough to mix it into the batter.

To Learn More

Cooking without a Grain of Salt, by Elma W. Bagg, Susan Bagg Todd, and Robert Ely Bagg.