



# How to Lower Sodium in Your Diet

*For people with diabetes*

*This handout explains why it is important for people with diabetes to watch how much sodium they eat. It includes tips and information about low-sodium food options.*

## Why is sodium important?

Sodium (salt) plays an important role in the body. It helps control fluid balance and maintain blood pressure. Too much sodium in the diet can increase blood pressure in many people. This can harm your kidneys and increase heart disease risk. If you have diabetes, reducing sodium in your diet may lower your risk of these problems.

## How much sodium is OK?

All people, including people with diabetes, should not eat more than 2,300 mg of sodium each day. One teaspoon of salt contains about 2,300 mg of sodium. Talk with your healthcare provider about how much sodium is right for you.

## How can I reduce my sodium intake?

One easy way to reduce sodium intake is to remove the salt shaker from the dinner table. It's OK to use some salt while cooking, but adding salt afterward can greatly increase your sodium intake. Here are some more tips to help you reduce your sodium intake:

At the Store	At Home	At the Restaurant
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on the outer edges of the grocery store. This is where you will find fresh and less processed foods (fresh fruits and vegetables, dried grains, fresh or frozen meat and poultry with no added salt or saline).</li> <li>Read nutrition labels and compare products. Choose the one with the least sodium.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Try making more meals from scratch instead of pre-packaged meals.</li> <li>Season your foods with lemon juice, garlic, herbs, spices, and salt-free seasonings.</li> <li>Use lower-sodium recipes of your favorite foods (available online) or use less salt than the recipe calls for.</li> <li>Track your sodium intake using a food log app (see references at the end of this handout).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Making small changes will help make your meal less salty (ask for salad instead of fries, or sauce on the side).</li> <li>Ask for a take-out box when you order your meal. Eat a smaller portion of a high-sodium meal and save the rest for another meal.</li> <li>Many chain restaurants offer nutrition information online. If so, check their menu before you go and choose items that are lower in sodium.</li> </ul>

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 Shake (11 fl oz)	
Servings Per Container 12	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 160	Calories from Fat 25
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 3g	5%
Saturated Fat 1g	5%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 20mg	7%
Sodium 210mg	9%
Potassium 450mg	13%
Total Carbohydrate 5g	2%
Dietary Fiber 3g	12%
Sugars 1g	
Protein 20g	50%

Sample Nutrition Facts label showing sodium content.

## Packaged Foods

Sodium is naturally present in many foods. But, most of the sodium we eat is in foods that are packaged, processed, or made in a restaurant. To reduce your sodium intake, choose foods that are low in salt. Read below to learn how to find out how much sodium is in packaged foods.

### How Sodium is Listed on a Nutrition Facts Label

The amount of sodium in a serving size is listed in milligrams (mg) on a Nutrition Facts label on packaged foods.

On the left is a sample Nutrition Facts label that shows where to look for the sodium content. Be sure to note the serving size. If you eat 2 servings of the food, you have eaten 2 times the sodium shown on the label.

In this example, an 11-ounce serving of this food has 210 mg of sodium. If you are on a 2,000 mg sodium diet, this is 10% (or 1 part out of 10) of your daily allowance.

### Sodium Claims

*Sodium claims* are often printed on food labels to help you make good choices. The list below gives the meaning of common claims. It will help you choose the foods that are right for you and your diet.

Claim	Definition
<i>Sodium free</i>	Less than 5 mg sodium per serving
<i>Salt free</i>	Product meets requirements for “sodium free”
<i>Very low sodium</i>	35 mg or less sodium per serving
<i>Low sodium</i>	140 mg or less sodium per serving
<i>Reduced or less sodium</i>	At least 25% less sodium per serving than the regular product
<i>Light in sodium</i>	50% less sodium per serving than the regular product
<i>Unsalted, no salt added, without added salt</i>	No salt is added during processing

### Do I need to give up the foods I love?

The table on the next page divides foods into 3 groups (OK to eat, eat sometimes, and foods to limit) based on how much sodium they have.

Use this table to help choose foods for your low-sodium meal plan. Remember to check the serving size on the Nutrition Facts label.

<b>Food Groups</b>	<b>OK to Eat</b> <i>Choose these foods every day. One serving has less than 100 mg sodium.</i>	<b>Eat Sometimes</b> <i>Choose these foods once in a while. One serving has less than 300 mg sodium.</i>	<b>Avoid These Foods</b> <i>Choose these foods rarely. One serving has more than 300 mg of sodium.</i>
<b>Fruits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All fruits and fruit juices</li> </ul>		
<b>Vegetables</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All fresh, frozen, and canned vegetables with no salt or sauces added</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most canned vegetables with salt</li> <li>Low-sodium tomato and V-8 juice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regular tomato or V-8 juice</li> <li>Ready-to-eat tomato sauces</li> <li>Pickled foods like sauerkraut, olives, and pickles</li> </ul>
<b>Meats and Other Protein Foods</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fresh meats, poultry, and fish (no salt added)</li> <li>Clams and mussels, steamed</li> <li>Unsalted peanut butter and nuts</li> <li>Tuna fish, canned without added salt</li> <li>Dried beans or peas, cooked without salt</li> <li>Tofu</li> <li>Eggs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Peanut butter</li> <li>Shellfish, not treated with salt</li> <li>Canned beans</li> <li>Frozen meals with less than 300 mg sodium</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tuna fish, canned with added salt</li> <li>Fried foods</li> <li>Salted, smoked, cured, or canned meats</li> <li>Lunch deli meats</li> <li>Spam</li> <li>Corned beef</li> <li>Hot dogs and sausage</li> <li>Jerky</li> <li>Ham and bacon</li> <li>Frozen meals with more than 600 mg sodium</li> </ul>
<b>Dairy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unsalted butter</li> <li>Unsalted cottage cheese</li> <li>Milk and yogurt</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Buttermilk</li> <li>Lower sodium cheeses like mozzarella, Swiss, cheddar, ricotta</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High-sodium cheeses like feta, bleu, and goat cheese</li> <li>Cottage cheese</li> </ul>
<b>Cereals, Grains, and Starches</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plain hot cereal</li> <li>Shredded wheat or puffed rice cereal</li> <li>Unsalted corn tortillas, granola, quick breads</li> <li>Low-sodium breads</li> <li>Rice, pasta, whole grains, cooked without salt</li> <li>Unsalted potatoes and squash</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Salted crackers and pretzels</li> <li>Most cold cereals</li> <li>Most breads and muffins</li> <li>Pancakes and waffles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stuffing mixes</li> <li>Cornbread</li> <li>Rice or noodles prepared with flavor packets</li> </ul>
<b>Spices, Seasonings, and Condiments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fresh or dried herbs</li> <li>Powders, not salts (for example, use onion and garlic powder instead of onion and garlic salt)</li> <li>Tabasco (no more than 1 tablespoon)</li> <li>Vinegar, lemon and lime juice</li> <li>Fresh garlic</li> <li>Sesame seeds</li> <li>Allspice</li> <li>Mrs. Dash and Lawry's salt-free seasonings</li> <li>Flavored extracts like vanilla and almond</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some hot sauces (check label for sodium content)</li> <li>Mayonnaise</li> <li>Mustard</li> <li>Low-sodium ketchup</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most canned soups</li> <li>Bouillion cubes and prepared broths</li> <li>Sauces: teriyaki, soy, fish, Worcestershire</li> <li>Sea salt, regular salt</li> <li>Baking soda (regular)</li> <li>Garlic, onion, and other flavored or seasoned salts</li> <li>Relishes</li> <li>Monosodium glutamate (MSG)</li> <li>Meat tenderizers</li> <li>Ketchup and barbecue sauce</li> <li>All seasoning packets</li> <li>Salad dressing</li> <li>Cheese sauce mixes, such as Alfredo sauce</li> <li>Olives</li> <li>Some hot sauces</li> </ul>



*Cooking at home with easy, low-sodium recipes can help you reduce your sodium intake.*

## Where can I find low-sodium recipes?

Visit these websites for low-sodium recipes to make at home:

- **American Diabetes Association**  
[diabetes.org/healthy-living/recipes-nutrition](https://diabetes.org/healthy-living/recipes-nutrition)
- **Mayo Clinic Low-Sodium Recipes**  
[www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/recipes/low-sodium-recipes/rcs-20077197](https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/recipes/low-sodium-recipes/rcs-20077197)
- **National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute**  
<https://healthyeating.nhlbi.nih.gov/?AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1>
- **New York Times Cooking (requires a subscription)**  
[cooking.nytimes.com/tag/low-sodium](https://cooking.nytimes.com/tag/low-sodium)
- **Sodium Girl Recipe Box**  
[sodiumgirl.com/recipe-box/](https://sodiumgirl.com/recipe-box/)

### Questions?

Your questions are important. Contact your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns. If you are a patient at:

- Endocrine and Diabetes Care Center**, call 206.598.4882 weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- UW Neighborhood Clinic**, call 206.520.5000 weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

**Your provider's name and phone number:**

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