

Sodium and Your Diet

Sodium is found naturally in all foods. Salt is made from sodium. Our bodies only need small amounts of sodium every day. Most Canadians eat almost 2 times the sodium they need.

Too much sodium in your diet can make you thirsty and make your body hold on to fluid. If you have kidney, heart, or liver problems this extra fluid causes swelling, makes your heart work harder, and can make it harder to breathe. Eating less sodium can help manage these problems.

Eating less sodium can also help lower your blood pressure. Lower blood pressure helps lower your risk of heart disease, heart failure, stroke, and kidney disease.

Where does sodium come from?

Most of the sodium we eat comes from processed and packaged foods, and restaurant foods. Sodium also comes from the salt we add at mealtime or in cooking.

Aim to eat **less than 2300 mg of sodium per day** or the amount recommended by your healthcare provider. The closer you can get to 1500 mg per day, the better. This includes the sodium in food and the salt you add in cooking and at the table.

1 tsp (5 mL) of salt = 2300 mg sodium

Getting used to a low sodium diet takes time. When you first cut back on salt and salty foods, foods may taste bland. Over time, your taste buds will get used to the taste of less salt. Some foods, especially processed and restaurant foods, will taste too salty.

Tips to lower your sodium intake

- Use little or no salt in cooking and at the table.
- Try garlic, onion, herbs, spices, lemon juice, vinegar, or salt-free seasonings to flavour your food instead of salt.
- Choose fresh foods and foods with no salt added.
- Prepare food at home more often. Use low sodium ingredients.
- Eat less processed and packaged foods.
- Read food labels to choose foods that are lower in sodium.
- Eat less restaurant and fast food.
- Limit condiments that are high in sodium such as ketchup, mustard, soy sauce, gravies, and salad dressings.
- Limit pickled foods, olives, salsa, chutneys, and dips.

Caution: Ask your doctor, pharmacist, or dietitian before using a salt substitute like No Salt® or Half Salt®. Some have potassium, which is a problem if you have kidney disease or other health conditions.

Read food labels

Reading food labels can help you choose lower sodium foods.

The Nutrition Facts table

- Compare brands. Choose foods with lower % Daily Value and smaller amounts of sodium.
- Choose foods with 5% Daily Value or lower more often.
- Foods with a % Daily Value higher than 15% are high in sodium. Choose these less often.
- Check the serving size at the top of the table. If you eat more or less than this amount, you need to adjust the amounts of nutrients listed. For example, in the table to the right, if you ate 1½ cup (350 g), you would get 150 mg (6% Daily Value) of sodium.

Nutrition Facts

Per ¾ cup (175 g)

Calories 160

% Daily Value*

Fat 2.5 g 3 %

Saturated 1.5 g 8 %

+Trans 0 g

Carbohydrate 25 g

Fibre 3 g 11 %

Sugars 15 g 15 %

Protein 8 g

Cholesterol 10 mg

Sodium 75 mg 3 %

Potassium 300 mg 6 %

Calcium 300 mg 23 %

Iron 1 mg 6 %

*5% or less is **a little**, 15% or more is **a lot**

The ingredient list

- Sodium can be called “salt”, “sodium”, or “soda” in the ingredient list.
- Ingredients are listed from most to least. Choose foods without sodium, or those that have sodium listed near the end of the list.

Low sodium label claims

Look for foods labelled as “sodium-free”, “low sodium”, or “no added salt”. Reduced sodium does not always mean the food is low in sodium. Also check the Nutrition Facts table for sodium amount.

For people with kidney disease

Foods labelled “sodium-free”, “low sodium”, or “no added salt” may have potassium and/or phosphorus added to replace the sodium.

- Check the Nutrition Facts table for the amount of sodium and potassium.
- Check the ingredient list for additives with phosphorus or potassium. Limit or avoid foods with these additives.

Food Lists

Use the food lists below to help you cut back on the sodium you eat every day. If you need to follow a low potassium or low phosphorus diet, talk to your dietitian about which of these foods are right for you.

Vegetables and Fruits

Lower sodium

- Fresh, frozen, or dried vegetables and fruit
- Canned tomatoes with no added salt
- Canned vegetables with no added salt
- 100% fruit juices

Higher sodium

- Canned vegetables with salt
- French fries, hash browns, or potato chips
- Frozen vegetables with sauce
- Instant potatoes
- Tomato juice, vegetable juice, or vegetable cocktail
- Tomato sauce

Grain Foods

Lower sodium

Choose foods with the lowest sodium amounts for the following:

- Breads, buns, bagels, pitas, or English muffins
- Barley, bulgur, millet, oats, quinoa, rice, or rye
- Crackers or rice cakes, unsalted
- Cold cereals or hot cereals (not instant)
- Homemade baked goods, such as muffins, pancakes or waffles made without added salt
- Pasta, couscous

Higher sodium

- Baked goods from dry mixes
- Baked goods from a restaurant or store
- Crackers and rice cakes, salted or seasoned
- Instant hot cereals
- Pasta, rice, or noodles that are canned, instant, or from a mix
- Stuffing mixes

Protein Foods

Milk, dairy, and soy foods

Lower sodium

- Milk or plant-based beverages (such as soy, oat, or almond)
- Small amounts of hard cheeses such as cheddar, mozzarella, marble, or Swiss
- Soft cheeses such as cream cheese, Brie, or ricotta
- Cottage cheese, no salt added
- Yogurt or kefir

Higher sodium

- Buttermilk
- Higher sodium cheeses, such as blue, feta, or Parmesan
- Cottage cheese
- Instant pudding or custard mixes
- Processed cheese slices or spreads

Meat, poultry, eggs, fish, and plant-based protein foods

Lower sodium

- Beans, peas, or lentils with no added salt
- Fresh eggs, meat, poultry, or fish
- Nuts or nut butter, unsalted
- Tofu
- Canned tuna or salmon, no salt added

Higher sodium

- Breaded or seasoned meat, poultry, or fish
- Canned meat, poultry, or fish with added salt
- Nuts, salted
- Processed meat such as:
 - bacon
 - bologna
 - corned beef
 - deli meat
 - ham
 - hot dogs
 - pepperoni
 - salami
 - sausages
 - smokies
- Plant-based burgers, sausages, deli meats, and breaded nuggets

Spices and seasonings

Lower sodium

- Herbs and spices with no salt added:
 - basil
 - black pepper
 - cardamom
 - cayenne pepper
 - chili flakes or oil
 - cinnamon
 - cumin
 - curry leaves
 - dry mustard
 - garlic, fresh or powder
 - ginger
 - lemongrass
 - mint
 - onion, fresh or powder
 - parsley
 - paprika
 - rosemary
 - tarragon
 - thyme
 - turmeric
- Salt-free seasonings such as Dash® or McCormick®

Higher sodium

- Sea salt, table salt, Himalayan salt, fleur de sel, or other salts
- Breading mixes
- Canned or packaged soup broth, bouillon cubes, or consommé
- Spices or seasoning mixes that have salt or sodium, such as:
 - celery salt
 - garlic salt
 - onion salt
 - lemon pepper
 - seasoning salt
 - chana masala
 - chat masala
 - meat masala
 - tandoori masala

Condiments and sauces

Lower sodium

- Homemade gravies, sauces, or dips made without salt
- Lemon juice, lime juice, or vinegar

Higher sodium

- Pre-made or packaged gravies, sauces, marinades, or dips
- Condiments such as mustard, ketchup, relish, tartar sauce, or salad dressings
- Salsa, pickles, olives, sauerkraut, or kimchi
- Sauces such as barbecue, black bean, fish, hoisin, oyster, steak, soy, or teriyaki

Other foods

Lower sodium

- Soft margarine (unsalted) and vegetable oils
- Homemade soups (you can control the amount of sodium/salt added)

Check the sodium amounts on labels of unsalted snacks such as:

- pretzels, tortilla chips, rice cakes, some microwave popcorn, or air popped popcorn

Higher sodium

- Bacon fat
- Fast food and restaurant food such as pizza or lasagna
- Snack foods such as salted chips, nachos, pretzels, popcorn, bhujia, or crackers
- Canned or dried soups
- Frozen, deli, or take-out meals

More support



- [Health Link](#) has dietitians to answer nutrition questions.
- Call 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian or complete a [self-referral form](#) on ahs.ca/811.