

Very Low Sodium (2 Gram) Diet



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
WEXNER MEDICAL CENTER

What is sodium?

Sodium is a mineral that is necessary for good health and is present in all foods. Most people eat more sodium than they need. Sodium is part of salt. Therefore, if you need to limit your sodium, you need to limit your intake of salt.

If the body cannot get rid of the extra sodium, fluid builds up. Extra fluid increases the work of the heart and kidneys, and may increase blood pressure. Some health conditions like liver disease, heart disease and kidney failure are affected greatly by this extra fluid. Eating less sodium may help control these problems.

You will sometimes see the term sodium abbreviated “Na” as in NaCl (Sodium Chloride), which is table salt.

Sources of Sodium

The sodium in our diet comes from three main sources:

- **Table salt** is the most common source of sodium in our diet. Salt is a combination of sodium and chloride. One teaspoon of salt has 2300 milligrams of sodium.
- **Processed foods** have large amounts of sodium. These include easy-to-prepare box mixes, frozen dinners, luncheon meats and many canned items. Soups, vegetables, pork and beans, and tomato products are a few examples. Many people do not know that processed foods like ready-to-eat cereals, breads and baked goods also can be high in sodium.
- **Sodium occurs naturally in most foods.** Unsalted, unprocessed foods usually have low sodium content. Most foods in your diet should come from this group. Examples are listed in this handout.

Other sources of sodium you might not think of:

Many non-prescription drugs (antacids, laxatives, aspirin, cough medicines, etc.) and mouthwash have sodium. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for more information. Water softening equipment will add a large amount of sodium to the water.

Sodium Guidelines

To choose foods that are healthier for you, look for these labels:

- **Sodium-free** – less than 5 milligrams of sodium per serving
- **Very low-sodium** – 35 milligrams or less per serving
- **Low-sodium** – 140 milligrams or less per serving

Remember, reduced sodium and unsalted products still have salt in them!

- **Reduced sodium** – usual sodium level is reduced by 25 percent
- **Unsalted, no salt added or without added salt** – made without the salt, but still has the sodium that's a natural part of the food

Know your salt

When you are on a very low sodium diet, even a small amount of salt has a lot of sodium in it.

Amount of Sodium in Salt	
1/4 teaspoon salt	600 milligrams of sodium
1/2 teaspoon salt	1,200 milligrams of sodium
3/4 teaspoon salt	1,800 milligrams of sodium
1 teaspoon salt	2,300 milligrams of sodium
1 teaspoon baking soda	1,000 milligrams of sodium

General guidelines

- **Do not** add salt to your foods when cooking or at the table.
- **Avoid** seasoned salts. These include onion salt, celery salt, “lite” salt, “low sodium” salt and “sea salt.” Accent, meat tenderizers and lemon pepper should also be avoided.
- **Be careful** if you choose a salt substitute. Many substitutes have large amounts of potassium in them, which can cause medical problems for some people. “Lite salts” contain sodium in smaller amounts, but are still too high for people who need to restrict sodium. Ask your doctor or dietitian if salt substitute is okay for you.
- Learn how to read labels to make good low sodium choices. Ingredients are listed by weight, in order from highest to lowest. Food additives high in sodium include salt, baking powder, brine or any additive that says the word “sodium”. Look for the words monosodium glutamate or disodium phosphate on the label.

An important note about processed foods:

- Many fat-reduced or calorie-reduced products are not lower in sodium than the regular product. In fact, many times they are higher. Examples of this include turkey-ham and turkey-bacon. When processed foods are used, read the label to make a smart choice.
- Once sodium is in a food, it cannot easily be taken out. Rinsing or boiling meats and other foods, like sauerkraut or canned vegetables, does not significantly decrease the sodium content. It is best to avoid these products unless they are salt-free.
- Restaurant foods are often very high in sodium. Very few restaurant foods are appropriate for a low sodium diet. Ask your dietitian for more information if you often eat in restaurants.

Food Type	Foods Allowed	Foods Not Allowed
Meat, Fish and Poultry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 oz. daily of any fresh meat, fish or poultry prepared with allowed seasonings. (Beef, chicken, Cornish hen, duck, goose, lamb, turkey, veal, filet fish and fresh pork.) • Low sodium canned tuna fish • Processed meats that have less than 100 mg per ounce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All smoked, cured, salted or pickled meat, fish and poultry (bacon, corned beef, hot dogs, ham, sardines, herring, processed boned and rolled poultry and meat) • Cold cuts • Soybean extenders • Sausage • Frozen meat, fish or poultry that have breading or gravy • Shellfish (clams, crab, lobster, oysters and scallops)
Vegetables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All fresh, frozen or canned without salt • Salt-free tomato and vegetable juices • Onion rings made with a salt-free batter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular canned vegetables • Sauerkraut, pickles and other vegetables prepared in salt water • Vegetables frozen in sauces and gravies • Tomato and vegetable juices • Onion rings
Fruits	All fruits allowed	
Cereals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dry cereals that have no more than 100 mg per serving • Cooked cereals prepared without salt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dry cereals that have more than 100 mg per serving • Instant cooked cereals
Beverages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carbonated beverages, coffee, decaffeinated coffee, tea, fruit juices and drinks • Unsalted tomato and vegetable juices • Alcohol in moderation (check with your doctor first) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gatorade and other high sodium sports drinks • Regular tomato and vegetable juices • Instant cocoa mixes

Food Type	Foods Allowed	Foods Not Allowed
Breads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to four slices enriched white bread, rye bread, Italian or wheat bread a day. If more than four slices of bread a day are desired, the additional bread must be salt free • Salt free bread as desired • Plain rolls, hamburger or hot dog buns may be substituted for one slice of bread serving, if made with low sodium baking powder and no salt • Biscuits, cornbread, pancakes, quick breads, muffins, waffles, can be substituted for bread (if made with low sodium baking powder and no salt) • Low sodium crackers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rolls with salted tops • Regular, frozen or commercial mixes of biscuits, cornbread, pancakes, quick breads, muffins and waffles • Crackers with salted tops, cheese crackers or other flavored snack crackers • Snack crackers with unsalted tops
Potatoes and Starches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White potatoes, sweet potatoes, red potatoes • ½ cup instant mashed potatoes with less than 75 mg per serving and no added salt • Unsalted French fries • Spaghetti, macaroni, hominy or noodles • White, brown or wild rice • Homemade dressing or stuffing with allowed ingredients 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boxed mixes, frozen, or store-prepared potato products (scalloped potatoes, au gratin potatoes, hash browns, German potato salad, creamed potatoes, and salted French fried potatoes) • Rice and noodle side dish mixes • Stuffing and dressing mixes
Cheese	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low sodium cheese which has less than 80 mg sodium per ounce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular cottage cheese, regular aged cheeses (Bleu Cheese, Cheddar, Colby, Edam, Longhorn, Limburger, Mozzarella, Parmesan, Ricotta and Romano) • Processed cheese and cheese spreads (American cheese, Velveeta or Cheese Whiz)
Milk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No more than 2 cups of milk per day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid buttermilk, commercial milkshakes and malted milk

Food Type	Foods Allowed	Foods Not Allowed
Fats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vegetable oils and shortening. • Homemade salad dressings made with allowed ingredients • Bottled unsalted salad dressings • No more than four teaspoons a day of salted butter or margarine • Unsalted butter or margarine as desired • No more than two tablespoons of mayonnaise a day • No more than two ounces of sweet or sour cream per day • Gravy and sauces made with allowed ingredients 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bacon or other salted pork fats • Commercial salad dressings • Packaged and canned gravies and sauces
Desserts and Sweets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One serving of a dessert per day (unless your doctor or dietitian tell you otherwise) • Desserts include: cake, cookies, custard, donuts, sweet rolls, ice cream, sherbet, pie, brownies and pudding made with allowed ingredients • Sodium free desserts as desired • Sugar, corn and maple syrup, honey, jelly, jam, marmalade, preserves, marshmallows, and plain hard or soft candy such as jellybeans, gumdrops, lemon drops, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Molasses, candy or desserts made with peanut butter or salted nuts, peanut brittle, instant cocoa mixes and licorice
Snack Foods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unsalted snack chips as desired (corn chips, tortilla chips, pretzels, potato chips, popcorn) • Unsalted nuts • Salsa made with allowed ingredients (salt free tomatoes, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any salted snack chips (corn chips, tortilla chips, pretzels, potato chips, popcorn (regular and microwave), and cheese popcorn) • Salted nuts • Party spreads and dips, bean dip and commercial salsa

Food Type	Foods Allowed	Foods Not Allowed
Frozen Dinners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choose from those containing less than 600 mg per serving. Keep in mind that this is over one fourth of your daily intake so choose other foods for your day carefully! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most frozen meals
Soups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unsalted homemade soups and unsalted canned soups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular canned soups, dried or instant soup mixes Frozen soups Broth, bouillon cubes, granules or powder, consommé Homemade soups made with added salt, ham, ham bones, salted fish or salty meat Low sodium canned soups, including “less sodium” soups
Sauces and Seasonings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Herbs, spices, lemon juice, vinegar, wine (except cooking wine or cooking sherry) or herb blends that do not contain sodium (ex. Mrs. Dash) Up to one tablespoon ketchup or one teaspoon prepared mustard per day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chili sauce, barbecue sauce, relishes, soy sauce, teriyaki sauce, Worcestershire sauce, horseradish prepared with salt and steak sauce

To follow a low sodium diet, you will need to be able to read food labels. Ask your dietitian for help if needed. Also, ask for the handout, [Making Sense Out of Food Labels](#).

Sample menu

Breakfast
<p>One cup milk</p> <p>Orange juice</p> <p>One poached egg</p> <p>One slice of toast with 1 teaspoon margarine and jelly</p> <p>Banana</p> <p>One cup frosted shredded wheat</p>
Lunch
<p>Grilled chicken sandwich (3 ounces fresh grilled chicken, 1 tablespoon mayonnaise, lettuce and tomato slice on a whole wheat roll)</p> <p>Unsalted pretzels</p> <p>Carrot sticks</p> <p>Apple</p>
Dinner
<p>One cup milk 3 ounces fresh, lean beef</p> <p>Baked potato</p> <p>Steamed broccoli with lemon and salt free herbs like</p> <p>Mrs. Dash Dinner roll 3 teaspoons margarine</p> <p>Fresh peach or canned slices 2 sugar cookies (homemade with no added salt)</p>
Snacks
<p>Iced tea</p> <p>Unsalted popcorn</p> <p>Fruit cocktail</p>

Talk to your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

For more health information, contact the Library for Health Information at **614-293-3707** or e-mail **health-info@osu.edu**.