How to Follow a Low-Sodium Diet
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Introduction

Note that while this module concentrates on following a low-sodium diet, other nutritional issues may be of concern to you as well. For example, everyone should watch the amount of fat they eat.

Also, if you have diabetes, you should watch the amount of sugar you eat. These issues are discussed in more detail in Module 8: Lifestyle Changes.

This module provides information on:

■ How to follow a low-sodium diet.
■ The sodium content of selected foods and condiments.
■ Substitutes for high-sodium foods and condiments.

It will help you:

■ Reduce your sodium intake.
■ Cook meals with low-sodium foods.
■ Make good choices when you eat in a restaurant.

This module has a lot of information in it. You don’t have to read it all at once. You may find it helpful to read it by sections and to come back whenever you have questions about a low-sodium diet.
What is a Low-Sodium Diet?

A low-sodium diet includes no more than 2,000 to 3,000 milligrams (mg) of sodium per day. That is the same as 2 to 3 grams of sodium a day. To give you an idea of how much that is, 1 teaspoon of salt = approximately 2,300 mg sodium.

People with mild heart failure (no or mild symptoms with vigorous or moderate exercise) are usually asked to limit their sodium intake to 3,000 mg per day.

People with moderate to severe heart failure (symptoms with light exercise, household chores or at rest) are usually asked to limit their sodium intake to 2,000 mg per day.

Check with your health care provider on the sodium limit that is best for you.

Cutting Back on Salt

If you need to limit the amount of salt and sodium in your diet, here are some suggestions from the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute:

- Read the food labels to help you pick foods lower in sodium.
- Pay attention to the serving size listed on the label. If you eat two cups of a food, but the serving size is one cup, you’ll need to double the amount of sodium listed.
- Look for foods that use one of these terms on the label: sodium-free, very low sodium, low sodium, reduced sodium, light in sodium or unsalted.

Measurement Key

Ounce = oz.     Milligram = mg     Tablespoon = tbsp.     Teaspoon = tsp.
Chapter 1

How Do I Follow a Low-Sodium Diet?

You can take four basic steps to reduce the amount of sodium in your diet:

1. Stop adding salt to your food.
2. Adapt your preferred foods to low-sodium versions.
3. Pick foods naturally low in sodium.
4. Learn to read food labels.

Step 1: Stop Adding Salt to Food

To accomplish this step, try the following tips:

- Take the saltshaker off of the table.
- Do not add salt when cooking.

You can reduce your sodium intake by as much as 30 percent by following the first two tips. People often say that food tastes bland without salt. You can make foods taste good without salt by trying the following tips:

- Experiment with low- or no-salt herbs, spices, and seasoning mixes.

- Try using seasonings like black, cayenne, or lemon pepper. Dried and fresh herbs such as garlic, garlic or onion powder (not salt), dill, parsley, and rosemary are also naturally very low in sodium. Combination spice mixes in a bottle are great as long as sodium or salt is not one of the ingredients.

- Sprinkle fresh lemon juice over vegetables and salads. Season or marinade meat, poultry, and fish ahead of time with onion, garlic, and your favorite herbs before cooking to bring out the flavor.

- Avoid spices and seasoning mixes with the word salt or sodium in the name. They will be high in sodium. For example, just a teaspoon of a seasoned salt such as garlic salt or celery salt contains about 1,500 mg of sodium. The chart here lists high-sodium seasonings.
It can be fun learning new ways to eat. The chart here lists low-sodium seasonings to use when cooking. There are many salt-free seasoning mixes in your supermarket. Look in the spice section for seasonings labeled “salt-free”.

### Examples of low-sodium spices, herbs, and seasonings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low-sodium</th>
<th>Low-sodium</th>
<th>Low-sodium</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allspice</td>
<td>Dry mustard</td>
<td>Paprika</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basil</td>
<td>Flavored extracts</td>
<td>Parsley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bay leaves</td>
<td>(vanilla, almond, etc.)</td>
<td>Pimento</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black pepper</td>
<td>Fresh garlic</td>
<td>Red pepper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cayenne pepper</td>
<td>Garlic powder</td>
<td>Sage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celery powder</td>
<td>Ginger</td>
<td>Salt substitute (with physician’s approval)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chili powder</td>
<td>Lemon juice</td>
<td>Tabasco pepper sauce (1 tbsp.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chives</td>
<td>Low-sodium ketchup (limit 1-2 tbsp.)</td>
<td>Thyme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinnamon</td>
<td>Mrs. DASH</td>
<td>Vinegar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cloves</td>
<td>Nutmeg</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocoa powder</td>
<td>Onion powder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumin</td>
<td>Oregano</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dill</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Examples of high-sodium spices, seasonings and condiments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High-sodium</th>
<th>High-sodium</th>
<th>High-sodium</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adobo</td>
<td>Kosher salt</td>
<td>Sazon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alfredo mixes</td>
<td>Lite salt</td>
<td>Sea salt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbecue sauce</td>
<td>Lite soy sauce</td>
<td>Seasoned salt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celery salt</td>
<td>Meat tenderizer</td>
<td>Soy sauce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocktail sauce</td>
<td>MSG (monosodium glutamate)</td>
<td>Steak sauces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry meat marinade mixes</td>
<td>Onion salt</td>
<td>Stir-fry mixes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry salad dressing mixes</td>
<td>Pickle relish</td>
<td>Stir-fry sauce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish sauce</td>
<td>Plum sauce</td>
<td>Taco sauce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garlic salt</td>
<td>Poultry seasoning</td>
<td>Taco seasoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generic sauce mixes</td>
<td>Regular ketchup</td>
<td>Teriyaki sauce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horseradish</td>
<td>Salt</td>
<td>Worcestershire sauce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Salt sense</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Step 2: Adapt Your Preferred Foods to Low-Sodium Versions**

To do this, try these tips:

- Consider getting a low-salt cookbook. You can find excellent low-salt cookbooks at your local library. You can also buy one at a bookstore or on the Internet.

After getting used to low-sodium eating, you will be able to adapt your favorite recipes to low-sodium versions. For example, if you like soup, make your own low-sodium version with fresh meat and vegetables. Toss the ingredients into a slow cooker, and use herbs and spices for seasonings. Make extra and freeze some for later meals.

- Use low-sodium substitutes for foods that you like. For example, prepare a fresh, lean pork roast instead of a country ham. You can cook fresh chicken, turkey, roast beef, or pork without adding salt and use the meats for sandwiches instead of packaged lunchmeats. Use fresh lettuce, tomato, and onion for flavoring.

  The chart on page 14 lists a variety of low-sodium alternatives for high-sodium foods.

- Look for low-sodium versions of the foods you like. Many types of canned goods are now available in low-sodium versions. Look for canned foods labeled sodium-free, no-salt, low-sodium, light in sodium, very low-sodium, reduced-sodium, less-sodium, or unsalted. You can also remove some sodium from canned foods by rinsing them. Keep in mind that this does not remove all of the sodium.

- Select low-sodium cheeses or yogurt when making sauces.
Step 3: Pick Foods Naturally Low in Sodium

To accomplish this step, try the following tips:

- **Choose fresh foods.** Fresh fruits and vegetables including freshly squeezed fruit and vegetable juices have very little sodium. The same is true for fresh meat, poultry, and fish. Generally, you can eat as much fresh food as you want without counting the sodium content. So, think fresh when choosing foods.

- **If you are not eating fresh foods, choose other low-sodium foods as much as possible.** Other good options include canned fruits and plain frozen vegetables. Dried beans, peas, rice, and lentils are also excellent low-sodium foods, but make sure not to add salt or other ingredients such as salt pork when cooking them.

Step 4: Learn to Read Food Labels

By reading food labels, you can learn which foods are high and low in sodium. As a rule, most processed foods whether they are frozen, canned, or boxed, are high in sodium. For example, most frozen TV dinners, frozen snack foods such as pizza rolls and egg rolls, canned vegetables, and instant hot cereals are high in sodium and should be avoided.

But not all processed foods are high in sodium. Some packaged foods are available in low- or no-salt versions.
Sometimes it is hard to know what to eat. The only way to know for sure is to read the food label. It is especially important to read the labels of processed foods or any foods with which you are unfamiliar.

The charts here list some high- and low-sodium foods, so you can get an idea of which foods you should choose and which ones you should avoid.

The next section will teach you how to read a food label for sodium content.

### Low-Sodium Foods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low-Sodium Foods</th>
<th>Low-Sodium Foods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beans, peas, rice, lentils, or pasta (dried and fresh, cooked without salt)</td>
<td>Milk (chocolate skim)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cereals (hot, regular cooking)</td>
<td>Milk (evaporated skim)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Club soda</td>
<td>Milk (nonfat dry)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee (regular and decaffeinated)</td>
<td>Milk (skim, low-fat, and regular)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruits (fresh, frozen, and canned)</td>
<td>Seltzer water (flavored)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit drinks</td>
<td>Soda pop (flavored and diet)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbs and spices (non-salt)</td>
<td>Soymilk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lemonade</td>
<td>Tea (iced)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meats, fish, and poultry (fresh)</td>
<td>Vegetables (fresh and plain frozen)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yogurt (plain and fruit flavored)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### High-Sodium Foods

#### Meats
- Anchovies
- Bacon
- Beef jerky
- Bologna
- Braunschweiger
- Breaded meat (frozen)
- Breakfast sausage
- Chipped Ham
- Corned Beef
- Dried Beef (jarred)
- Herring (jarred)
- Hot dogs
- Hot sausage
- Knockwurst
- Kielbasa
- Pastrami
- Pepperoni
- Pickled loaf
- Pickled meats and eggs
- Pimento loaf
- Pot pies (frozen)
- Salami
- Sardines
- Tuna, salmon, and chicken (canned regular)
- Vienna sausage

#### Milk products
- Buttermilk
- Canned milk

#### Starches
- Baked beans (canned)
- Batter mixes
- Biscuit and pancake mixes
- Corn and potato chips
- Hot cereals (instant)
- Macaroni and cheese (boxed)
- Popcorn (regular microwave)
- Stuffing mixes
- Waffles (frozen)

#### Other
- Bouillon cubes and broth
- Soups (canned regular)

#### Vegetables
- Pickles (sweet and dill)
- Pizza sauce

#### Regular canned vegetables
- Regular jarred and canned tomatoes
- Sauerkraut
- Spaghetti sauce
- Stewed tomatoes
- Tomato and vegetable juice
- Tomato sauce

#### Regular jarred and canned tomatoes
Reading a Food Label for Sodium Content

Begin by reviewing the serving size and sodium content information (see the circled areas on the sample). The serving size for the food is 1 cup. The sodium content for that serving is 130 mg.

If you eat the same sized serving as the one listed on the label, then you are eating the amount of sodium that is listed. But if the amount you actually eat is either larger or smaller, the amount of sodium you will be eating will also be larger or smaller.

For example, if you eat a double portion of the food shown on the label, you will also be eating twice as much sodium as listed on the label. A 2-cup serving of the food would contain 260 mg of sodium.
Other Tips to Help You Get Started

It can be difficult to change your eating habits. It may take weeks before you enjoy the taste of low-sodium foods, but your taste buds will adjust. Eventually you may not even miss the salt.

These tips can help you get off to a good start:

- Make changes slowly instead of all at once.
- Adapt things you like to eat so they are lower in sodium, rather than trying to totally change your diet.
- Keep a list of low-sodium foods in the kitchen. The refrigerator is a good spot. The chart on page 9 lists some low-sodium foods.
- Learn which foods are high-sodium, and do not buy them. That way you will not be tempted to eat them. The chart on page 10 lists some high-sodium foods.
- When picking entrees or main food items, no more than one food item should have more than 500 mg of sodium.
- Think about it this way – if your doctor or nurse recommended that you eat 2,000 mg of sodium in a day, 500 mg is one-fourth of your daily amount.
- Make a list of the amount of sodium you eat with each meal for a few days. The next section explains how to track your sodium intake.
Chapter 3

Tracking the Sodium in Your Diet

To find out how much sodium you are eating, keep a record of everything you eat and drink for four days. Do not forget to include snacks.

You can use the chart on page 15 to track what you eat. A full-page version of the chart can be printed from our Web site: www.abouthf.org.

If you don’t know the sodium content of a particular food, write down the food anyway. Your nurse or dietitian will work with you to estimate the sodium content. You can also look up the sodium content of foods on the Internet.

Add up the amount of sodium you ate each day. If you find that you ate more than 2,000-3,000 mg of sodium each day, look at each item on the list to figure out which foods caused the trouble. Think about where you might be able to cut down on sodium.

You can also review the list of what you ate with your nurse, doctor, or dietitian to find out how your sodium intake compares to what is best for you.
### Examples of High-Sodium Foods and Low-Sodium Alternatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instead of these high-sodium foods</th>
<th>Amount of sodium</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consider these low-sodium alternatives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food Item</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baking powder (1 tsp.)</td>
<td>400–550 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low sodium baking powder (1 tsp.)</td>
<td>5 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garlic salt (1 tsp.)</td>
<td>1,480 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garlic powder (1 tsp.)</td>
<td>1 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peanut butter (2 tsp.)</td>
<td>150–250 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsalted peanut butter (2 tbsp.)</td>
<td>0 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canned pasta sauce (1/4 cup)</td>
<td>125–275 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No salt added pasta sauce (1/4 cup)</td>
<td>25 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French fries (small order)</td>
<td>150-700 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsalted french fries</td>
<td>10–20 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salted nuts (1 oz.)</td>
<td>120–250 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsalted nuts (1 oz.)</td>
<td>3–10 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saltine crackers (1 cracker)</td>
<td>70 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-sodium saltine crackers (1 cracker)</td>
<td>7 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-rising flour (1 cup)</td>
<td>1,600 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enriched white or whole wheat flour (1 cup)</td>
<td>3–6 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ham (3 oz.)</td>
<td>1,025 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresh pork (3 oz.)</td>
<td>60 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instant oatmeal (3/4 cup)</td>
<td>180 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular cooking oatmeal (3/4 cup)</td>
<td>5 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey ham (3 oz.)</td>
<td>865 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey (3 oz.)</td>
<td>75 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corned beef (3 oz.)</td>
<td>800 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roast beef (3 oz.)</td>
<td>60 mg</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tracking the Sodium You Eat

Keep a record of everything you eat and drink for four days of typical eating. Review your chart with your nurse or dietitian to be sure you’re not consuming too much sodium.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Breakfast</th>
<th>Lunch</th>
<th>Dinner</th>
<th>Snacks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Day 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Day 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Day 4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Questions to Ask Your Doctor or Nurse

What is my sodium limit per day?

Reason for asking this question: Most people with heart failure should limit their sodium intake, even if they do not have symptoms. Following a low-sodium diet will help prevent fluid from building up in your body and may even decrease your need for some medications.

Your health care provider is the best person to tell you exactly how much sodium you can eat each day, but they may forget to discuss this important aspect of your care. So ask them about your sodium limit.

The chart here shows the sodium content of selected foods to give you an idea of how much sodium you consume each day.
# Examples of Sodium Content of Selected Foods

## Foods with less than 10 mg of sodium per serving
- Fruit and fruit juices (fresh, frozen or canned)
- Honey
- Hot cereals such as oatmeal, wheat, and oat bran (regular cooking, not instant which is high in sodium, 1 cup with no salt added while cooking)
- Jelly beans (10 large)
- Macaroni, noodles, rice, and barley (cooked in unsalted water with no added salt, 1 cup)
- Salt-free herbs and spices
- Shredded wheat or puffed rice type cereals (1 cup)
- Sugar
- Unsalted nuts
- Unsalted peanut butter
- Unsalted butter or margarine (not regular)
- Unsalted dry curd cottage cheese (½ cup)
- Vegetables (most types fresh or frozen except those in the 10–40 mg section)
- Vinegar (most)

## Foods with 10–40 mg of sodium per serving
- Beets (½ cup)
- Beet greens (¼ cup)
- Carrots (1 cup)
- Celery (2 stalks)
- Club soda (8 oz.)
- Granola type cereal (½ cup)
- Kale (⅞ cup)
- Soda pop (8 oz.)
- Spinach (½ cup cooked)
- Vanilla wafers (2 cookies)
- White wine (4 oz.)

## Foods with 40–65 mg of sodium per serving
- Beef, pork, lamb, and poultry (fresh, 3 oz.)
- Corn tortilla (1)
- Egg (1)
- Fish (fresh, 3 oz.)
- Fruit-filled cookies (1)
- Shrimp (2 oz.)

## Foods with 65–120 mg of sodium per serving
- Clams, steamed (3 oz.)
- Ice cream (½ cup)
- Mayonnaise (1 tbsp.)
- Milk (whole or skim, 1 cup)
- Milk (evaporated, ½ cup)
- Mustard, chili, and hot sauce (1 tsp.)
- Yogurt (1 cup)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sodium Range</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 120–175 mg   | Bread (some types, 1 slice)  
|              | Chocolate covered peanut butter cups (2)  
|              | English muffin (½)  
|              | Ketchup and steak sauce (1 tsp.)  
|              | Olives (ripe, 5)  
|              | Sardines (1 large)  
|              | Peanut butter (regular, 2 tbsp.) |
| 175–350 mg   | Buttermilk (1 cup)  
|              | Cheese (grated packaged, ¼ cup)  
|              | Clams (canned, ¼ cup)  
|              | Cereal (ring, nugget, and flaked, ⅔ to 1 cup)  
|              | Tuna (canned, 3 oz.)  
|              | Vegetables (canned, 1/2 cup) |
| 350–500 mg   | Beans (canned, ½ cup)  
|              | Cheese (2 oz. of cheddar, ¾ cup of cottage cheese, ½ cup of Parmesan, 1½ oz. of processed cheese, 2 oz. of Swiss cheese)  
|              | Cottage cheese (low-fat, ½ cup)  
|              | Pancake (1, 6-inch)  
|              | Tomato juice (canned, ¾ cup) |
| 500–800 mg   | Chicken broth, canned and reduced sodium (1 cup)  
|              | Chili beans (½ cup)  
|              | Cornbread (2 inch square)  
|              | Hot dog (beef and chicken, 1)  
|              | Pork sausage (2 links)  
|              | Pot pie (beef and chicken, ⅓ of 9-inch diameter)  
|              | Salad dressing (average, 2 tbsp.)  
|              | Soups (some canned, 1 cup)  
|              | Soy sauce (lower sodium, 1 tbsp.)  
|              | Stuffing mix (boxed and prepared, ½ cup) |
| >800 mg      | Baking soda (1 tsp.)  
|              | Bouillon cube (1 cube)  
|              | Chicken broth (canned, regular, 1 cup)  
|              | Corned beef (3 oz.)  
|              | Dill pickle (1 large)  
|              | Ham (lean, 3 oz.)  
|              | Lunchmeats (2 oz.)  
|              | Macaroni and cheese (packaged, 1 cup)  
|              | Main dishes (canned or frozen)  
|              | Pork and beans (canned, 1 cup)  
|              | Pudding (instant chocolate, 1 cup)  
|              | Sauerkraut (⅔ cup)  
|              | Soup (canned, 1 cup)  
|              | Soy sauce (regular, 1 tbsp.)  
|              | Spaghetti sauce (bottled, 1 cup) |
I hear a lot about sodium, but what about potassium? Should I be on a diet that is high or low in potassium?

**Reason for asking this question:** Your body needs potassium to work properly, so it is important that you have the right amount in your blood.

Some heart failure medicines can cause potassium levels to go either up or down. For example:

- Water pills may cause a drop in potassium.
- Angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitor and spironolactone pills may cause an increase in potassium. (See Module 3: Heart Failure Medicines for definitions and more information).

Your health care provider should check your blood potassium level and tell you if you need to do anything special to keep your potassium level normal. They may also prescribe a potassium pill to make sure you are getting enough potassium.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If your potassium level is high, your health care provider may advise you to <strong>avoid</strong> eating foods high in potassium. Foods high in potassium include:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Avocados</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Bananas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Beans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Coconut water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Dried fruits (prunes, dates, raisins)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Nuts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Oranges and other citrus fruits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Potatoes and sweet potatoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Spinach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Tomatoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Winter squash</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the other hand, if you have low potassium, your health care provider may advise you to **eat** foods high in potassium.
Questions and Answers
About a Low-Sodium Diet

Question: Are there sources of sodium that I need to watch out for?

Answer: Most of the sodium we eat comes from salt, but sodium can also be found in many foods, drinks, and medicines.

Some things you should know about sodium that can help you eat less of it:

- If your health care provider prescribes an antibiotic, ask for one without sodium.
- The chemical symbol for sodium is Na. You may also see the symbol NaCl for sodium chloride.
- Watch for the word soda on food labels. For example you may see sodium bicarbonate (baking soda) or sodium carbonate on packages. These products contain sodium compounds. Try to avoid them if possible.
- Preservatives account for much of the sodium in processed foods. The names of some high-sodium preservatives are: sodium alginate, sodium sulfite, sodium caseinate, and sodium benzoate.
- Some over-the-counter drugs have large amounts of sodium. Carefully read the labels. Avoid products such as fizzing drugs.
Reduce your sodium intake—and boost your heart health—with a few simple steps:

- Choose fresh vegetables and foods that are fresh whenever possible. Or, look for canned or frozen foods without added sauces or salt.
- Cut back on convenience foods that are typically high in sodium, such as frozen pizza, TV dinners, instant rice mixes, and canned soups.
- If you must buy packaged or processed foods, check the label first. Whenever possible, choose foods that have less than 100 mg of sodium per 100 grams.
- Try not to use salt in cooking water and remove the saltshaker from the table.
- Limit salty snacks such as chips, pretzels, and salted nuts.
- Eat at home more often to better control your intake of sodium.
- When dining out, request that your meal be prepared with little salt.

Question: How can I follow a low-sodium diet when I eat out?

Answer: Many people go out to eat several times each week.

Eating out, whether it is at a restaurant, a friend’s house, or a party, can be challenging if you are on a low-sodium diet. But you can go out to eat and maintain a low-sodium diet, if you are careful.

Use the following tips while eating out:

- Choose restaurants that offer fresh food choices.
- Pick preparations without breading, because breading contains salt.
- Be specific about what you want and how you want it prepared when ordering. For example, ask that your food be prepared without added salt, monosodium glutamate (MSG) or soy sauce.
- Do not be afraid to question your waiter about how the food is prepared.
Choose foods without sauces or ask for sauce and salad dressing “on the side”. If you use salad dressing, dip the tines of your fork into the dressing cup and then pierce your food, instead of pouring the dressing over your food. That way you get the flavor without all the sodium. Use the same technique with other types of sauces such as barbecue, steak, creamed, cheesy, Hollandaise, Alfredo, or red spaghetti sauces. It also works with gravies.

Limit use of condiments that are high in sodium such as Worcestershire sauce, steak sauce, or ketchup.

Avoid dishes named au gratin, Parmesan, hashed, Newberg, casserole, and Devonshire, because they are high in sodium.

Be careful of foods that are labeled as good for your heart. These foods are usually low-fat, but they may be high in sodium. In many cases, salt is used to flavor low-fat foods.

Choose the salad bar. It can be an excellent way to eat a low-sodium meal in a restaurant. But remember the following guidelines when selecting items:

- Choose fresh vegetables, fruits, and eggs served in their natural state. That includes lettuce greens, spinach greens, tomatoes, cucumbers, onions, radishes, green peppers, red peppers, alfalfa sprouts, fresh mushrooms, broccoli, cauliflower, carrots, red cabbage, and hard-boiled eggs.
Avoid high-sodium foods including croutons, green olives, black olives, shredded cheese, bacon bits, macaroni salad, potato salad, coleslaw, sunflower seeds, pepperoni, Chinese noodles, pickles, and creamy salad dressings.

Choose the following salad dressings: oil and vinegar, lemon, and flavored vinegars such as balsamic and raspberry.

Avoid the regular, light, and fat-free dressings unless you order on the side and dip your fork tines in the dressing. They are all high in sodium.

If you are at a party, eat fresh fruits and raw vegetables instead of snack foods such as potato chips, salted popcorn, pretzels, or peanuts. Avoid the dips and party spreads because of their high sodium content. If you decrease your sodium intake before and after a big event where you may be eating a lot of high-sodium foods, you can help prevent your body from retaining fluid.

Question: What can I do to stay on my diet at a fast food restaurant, pizza parlor, or deli?

Answer: Eating at a fast food restaurant, pizza parlor, or deli can be especially difficult, because most of the menu items are very high in sodium.

The chart here lists the sodium content in some typical types of fast foods.

Still it is possible to make lower sodium choices, if you try the following:

**At fast food restaurants, choose:**

- A hamburger or grilled chicken sandwich without condiments. Add small amounts of mustard or mayonnaise yourself.
- French fries without salt.
- The salad bar.
At a deli, choose:

- The salad bar.
- Vegetarian sandwiches with fresh vegetables, including lettuce, spinach, tomato, onion, fresh mushrooms, radishes, cucumbers, and sprouts.
- Use small amounts of mayonnaise (1 tablespoon contains 75 mg of sodium) or mustard (1 teaspoon contains 55 mg of sodium) as condiments.
- Avoid items such as the deli meat and cheese sandwiches, sardines, caviar, and pickled or brined foods such as olives.

At a pizza parlor, choose:

- Less sauce.
- More vegetable toppings.
- Ask for fresh mushrooms, green peppers, fresh tomatoes, onions, and other fresh vegetables.
- Part-skim mozzarella cheese.
- Avoid pepperoni or sausage and processed cheeses such as Parmesan.

Examples of sodium content of fast foods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food serving</th>
<th>Sodium content per serving</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fried chicken (1 piece or serving)</td>
<td>500–800 mg</td>
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<td>Mashed potatoes with gravy</td>
<td>297 mg</td>
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<td>Small hamburger</td>
<td>506 mg</td>
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<tr>
<td>Small cheeseburger</td>
<td>743 mg</td>
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<tr>
<td>Large cheeseburger</td>
<td>1,220 mg</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chef salad</td>
<td>850 mg</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bean burrito</td>
<td>922 mg</td>
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<td>Taco</td>
<td>273 mg</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enchilada</td>
<td>1,260 mg</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taco salad</td>
<td>1,368 mg</td>
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Learn More

You can learn more about how to take control of your heart failure by reading the other modules in this series. You can get copies of these modules from your health care provider. Or you can visit the Heart Failure Society of America web site at: www.hfsa.org.

The topics covered in the other modules include:

- Introduction: Taking Control of Heart Failure
- Heart Failure Medicines
- Self-Care: Following Your Treatment Plan and Dealing with Your Symptoms
- Exercise and Activity
- Managing Feelings About Heart Failure
- Tips for Family and Friends
- Lifestyle Changes: Managing Other Chronic Conditions
- Advance Care Planning
- Heart Rhythm Problems
- How to Evaluate Claims of New Heart Failure
- Treatments and Cures

These modules are not intended to replace regular medical care. You should see your health care provider regularly. The information in these modules can help you work better with your health care provider.
## Important Information

Please write down important contact information in the space below. You may also want to share this information with family members and friends.

### Health Care Provider Treating Me for Heart Failure:

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### Other Important Phone Numbers:

- Ambulance, fire department, or emergency services: **911**
- Pharmacy: ____________________________
- Other health care providers:
  - __________________________________
  - __________________________________
  - __________________________________
  - __________________________________
  - __________________________________
About the Heart Failure Society of America, Inc.

In the spring of 1994, a small group of academic cardiologists gathered in New York to discuss the formation of a society that would focus on heart failure. This group had long recognized that the disease was on the rise; yet there was no venue for researchers, trainees, and clinicians to gather to discuss new treatments, research results, and the rise in health care costs associated with heart failure. A society dedicated to heart failure would bring together health care professionals, including researchers, physicians, nurses and other allied health care professionals, to learn more about the mechanisms of the disease, how best to treat patients, play a role in reducing health care costs, etc. The meeting led to the incorporation of the Heart Failure Society of America, Inc.

The Heart Failure Society of America, Inc. (HFSA) represents the first organized effort by heart failure experts from the Americas to provide a forum for all those interested in heart function, heart failure, and congestive heart failure (CHF) research and patient care.