

Low Sodium “Salt” Diet

What Is a Low-Sodium Diet?

A low-sodium diet restricts the amount of sodium (salt) in your diet. On this diet, you should aim to consume no more than 2,300 milligrams (mg) of sodium per day. This is the amount in about one teaspoon of table salt.

Sodium is a mineral found in many foods. Most people consume much more sodium than they need. Diets high in sodium can increase blood pressure. A high-sodium diet may increase your risk of stroke. Reducing your sodium intake may help lower blood pressure.

Why is a Low Sodium diet important for me?

High amounts of sodium or “salt” in your diet can make high blood pressure worse. Sodium does this by making your body hold on to too much water. High sodium in the diet can also increase the chances of having a kidney stone.

What Foods Are Highest in Sodium?

Foods highest in sodium include table salt (about 50% sodium), convenience foods, preserved foods, and processed foods. Examples of processed foods include:

- Canned foods
- Frozen dinners
- Snack food
- Packaged starchy foods (seasoned rice, instant mashed potatoes, macaroni and cheese)
- Baking mixes
- Deli meats and cheeses
- Sausages and cured or smoked meats

Food Choices on a Low-Sodium Diet

Grains

Recommended foods:

- Breads and rolls without salted tops
- Ready-to-eat and uncooked cereals (with less than 5% Daily Value [DV] for sodium)
- Muffins
- Unsalted crackers and breadsticks
- Low-sodium or homemade breadcrumbs or stuffing
- Rice, pasta, bulgur, couscous (prepared without salt)

Foods to avoid:

- Breads, rolls, and crackers with salted tops
- Quick breads, self-rising flour, and biscuit mixes
- Regular bread crumbs
- Instant hot cereals
- Commercially prepared rice, pasta, or stuffing mixes

Vegetables

Recommended foods:

- All fresh vegetables
- Frozen and canned vegetables without added salt
- Low-sodium vegetable juices

Foods to avoid:

- Regular canned vegetables and juices
- Sauerkraut
- Frozen vegetables with sauces
- Commercially prepared potato and vegetable mixes

Fruits

Recommended foods:

- Fresh, frozen, and canned juices
- Fruit juices

Foods to avoid:

- None

Milk

Recommended foods:

- Milk
- Yogurt
- Hard cheeses (including Swiss, cheddar, and Monterey Jack)
- Low-sodium cheeses (including ricotta, cream cheese, and mozzarella)
- Ice cream

Foods to avoid:

- Processed cheese, cottage cheese, cheese spreads, and sauces
- Buttermilk

Meats and Beans

Recommended foods:

- Fresh or frozen beef, lamb, pork, poultry, fish, and shellfish
- Eggs and egg substitutes
- Low-sodium peanut butter
- Dried peas and beans
- Unsalted nuts

Foods to avoid:

- Smoked, cured, salted, or canned meat, fish, or poultry (including bacon, cold cuts, hotdogs, sausages, sardines, and anchovies)
- Frozen, breaded meats
- Salted nuts

Fats and Oils

Recommended foods:

- Low-sodium or unsalted butter and margarine spreads
- Low-sodium salad dressings made with oil

Foods to avoid:

- Oil mixed with other, high-sodium ingredients (salad dressing)

Snacks, Sweets, and Condiments

Recommended foods:

- Low-sodium or unsalted versions of broths, soups, soy sauce, condiments, and snack foods
- Pepper, herbs, spices, vinegar, lemon, or lime juice
- Ice cream, sherbet, homemade pie, and pudding without added salt

Foods to avoid:

- Broth, soups, gravies, and sauces made from instant mixes or other high-sodium ingredients
- Salted snack foods
- Olives
- Meat tenderizers, seasoning salt, and most flavored vinegars
- Commercial dessert mixes, cake, pie, instant pudding

Beverages

Recommended beverages:

- Most beverages

Beverages to avoid:

- Commercially softened water

Suggestions

Include a lot of whole grains, fruits, and vegetables in your diet. Whenever possible, choose fresh foods instead of processed foods.

Read food labels. Look for products marked as:

Sodium-free

Very low-sodium

Low-sodium

No added salt

Unsalted

Skip the salt when cooking or at the table. If food needs more flavor, be creative. Try different herbs and spices. Garlic and onion also add a lot of flavor to foods.

Avoid fast food and convenience food. They generally have a lot of added salt.