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## Low-salt diet

### Alternate Names

Low-sodium diet; Salt restriction

Your body needs salt to work properly. Salt contains sodium. Sodium helps your body control many functions. Too much sodium in your diet can be bad for you. For most people, dietary sodium comes from salt that is in or added to their food.

If you have high blood pressure or heart failure, you may have to limit how much salt you eat every day. Even people with normal blood pressure will have lower (and healthier) blood pressure if they lower how much salt they eat.

Dietary sodium is measured in milligrams (mg). Your doctor may tell you to eat no more than 2,300 mg a day when you have these conditions. For some people, 1,500 mg a day is an even better goal.

Eating a variety of foods every day can help you limit salt. Try to eat a balanced diet.

Buy fresh vegetables and fruits whenever possible. They are naturally low in salt. Canned foods often contain salt to preserve the color of the food and keep it looking fresh. For this reason, it is better to buy fresh foods. Also buy:

- Fresh meats, chicken or turkey, and fish
- Fresh or frozen vegetables and fruits

Look for these words on labels: low-sodium, sodium-free, no salt added, sodium-reduced, or unsalted. Check all labels for how much salt foods contain per serving.

Ingredients are listed in order of the amount the food contains. Avoid foods that list salt near the top of the list of ingredients. A product with less than 100 mg of salt per serving is good.

See also: [How to read food labels](#)

Stay away from foods that are always high in salt. Some common ones are:

- Processed foods, such as cured or smoked meats, bacon, hot dogs, sausage, bologna, ham, and salami
- Anchovies, olives, pickles, and sauerkraut
- Soy and Worcestershire sauces, tomato and other vegetable juices, and most cheeses
- Many bottled salad dressings and salad dressing mixes
- Most snack foods, such as chips, crackers, and others

When you cook, replace salt with other seasonings. Pepper, garlic, herbs, and lemon are good choices. Avoid packaged spice blends. They often contain salt.

Use garlic and onion powder, not garlic and onion salt. Do not eat foods with monosodium glutamate (MSG).

When you go out to eat, stick to steamed, grilled, baked, boiled, and broiled foods with no added salt, sauce, or cheese. If you think the restaurant might use MSG, ask them not to add it to your order.

Use oil and vinegar on salads. Add fresh or dried herbs. Eat fresh fruit or sorbet for dessert, when you have dessert. Take the salt shaker off your table. Replace it with a salt-free seasoning mix.

Ask your doctor or pharmacist what antacids and laxatives contain little or no salt, if you need these medicines. Some have a lot of salt in them.

Home water softeners add salt to water. If you have one, limit how much tap water you drink. Drink bottled water instead.

Ask your doctor if a salt substitute is safe for you. Many contain a lot of potassium. This may be harmful if you have certain medical conditions or if you are taking certain medicines. However, if extra potassium in your diet would not be harmful to you, a salt substitute is a good way to lower the amount of sodium in your diet.