

# Lower Your Sodium for Better Health

If you need to reduce how much sodium you consume, you are not alone. Lowering your sodium can help improve your blood pressure and reduce the risk of stroke or heart and kidney disease. It's recommended you consume:

- Less than 2,300 mg of sodium per day if you have normal blood pressure
- Less than 1,500 mg of sodium per day if you have high blood pressure, or if recommended by your healthcare provider

## How to Lower Your Sodium

The key to lowering your sodium intake is to eat less processed and restaurant foods. Most of the sodium we eat comes from these two sources. Even foods that may not taste salty can be major sources of sodium.

## What Are Processed Foods?

Processed foods generally come in packages and have a nutrition label. They include hot dogs, frozen meals, sugary beverages, and crackers and baked goods. Some processed foods are better than others. Baby carrots or unsalted nuts are “minimally” processed, nutritious snacks.

## Tips at the grocery store:

- Buy fresh, frozen or canned vegetables with no salt or sauce added.
- Buy fresh poultry, fish, pork and other lean meat, rather than processed and cured meats such as bacon, sausage or deli meat.
- Choose foods labeled “low sodium,” “reduced sodium” or “no salt added.”
- Read food labels on all foods—even those you might not think are salty. Compare and choose foods with a lower amount of sodium per serving. Remember, the more servings you eat of the food, the more sodium you eat too.

### Look at nutrition labels and choose either:

- Very low sodium = 35 mg or less per serving
- Low sodium = 140 mg or less per serving

## Tips at home:

- Replace or reduce the amount of salt you use when cooking. Try garlic, lemon juice, herbs, spices or salt-free seasonings.
- Rinse canned foods such as beans, tuna and vegetables.
- Make your own sauces and salad dressings. Use yogurt as a base and add spices such as cumin, curry or dill. Create marinades using orange or pineapple juice.
- Limit mixes and instant foods such as Hamburger Helper™ or flavored rice.



## Where Does Sodium Come From?

- Other: <1%
- Added at the table: 5%
- Home cooking or preparation: 6%
- Naturally occurring: 14%
- Processed foods and restaurant foods: 71%



## Sutter Resources

A Sutter Health registered dietitian can help you get started with your low-sodium eating plan. Ask your healthcare team for a referral, or call your local Sutter Health Nutrition Department. [sutterhealth.org/health/nutrition](https://www.sutterhealth.org/health/nutrition)

## Sodium vs. Salt

Sodium and salt are not the same. Sodium is a mineral. Salt is a crystal-like compound made up of sodium and chloride minerals. Less than half (40%) of table salt is made up of sodium.

## Tips when dining out:

- Ask for a menu with nutrition information, or ask your server for low-sodium options.
- Ask that no salt be added to your meal, or ask for a side of vegetables or fruit prepared with no salt.
- Split a meal with a friend or family member.
- Limit takeout and fast food to an occasional treat.

## Choose Low-Sodium Foods

Find “salt shocker” foods that you may normally eat, and replace them with lower-sodium foods.

	Choose	Limit or Avoid
Meals and Soups	Home-cooked meals and soups. Low-sodium canned soups.	Premade, frozen or restaurant meals. Regular (full-sodium) canned soups.
Meat, Poultry and Fish	Fresh or frozen meat, poultry and fish (check for added salt water or saline). Low-sodium canned products (rinse before eating).	Meat, poultry and fish that has been cured, smoked or spiced. Bacon, ham, sausage, hot dogs, corned beef, lunch meat, jerky. Regular (full-sodium) canned products.
Cheese	Swiss, ricotta and fresh mozzarella cheese. Cream cheese. Low-sodium cheese and cottage cheese.	Processed cheese. Cheese spreads, dips and sauces. Regular (full-sodium) cheese and cottage cheese.
Savory Snacks	Low-sodium or unsalted nuts, seeds, pretzels, chips or crackers. Homemade (not microwave) popcorn.	Salted nuts, seeds, pretzels, chips, crackers or popcorn.
Grains	Plain, unseasoned rice, grains and pasta. Unflavored oatmeal. Puffed rice or shredded wheat cereal.	Bread and rolls. Instant hot cereals. Boxed baking mixes (waffles, pancakes, bread, cake). Croutons. Instant noodles. Rice or pasta mixes.
Vegetables	Canned or frozen vegetables without added sodium or sauces. Low-sodium tomato sauce and vegetable juice.	Relishes, olives and pickled vegetables. Boxed potato mixes. Canned and frozen vegetables. Regular (full-sodium) tomato sauce and vegetable juice.
Sauces, Dressing and Condiments	Homemade sauces and dressings. Vinegar, lemons, herbs or dry mustard. Low-sodium sauces, dressings and condiments.	Barbecue, teriyaki and steak sauce. Fish sauce. All soy sauce, including reduced-sodium. Gravy. Marinades. Regular (full-sodium) condiments such as ketchup, mustard, cocktail sauce and tartar sauce.
Seasonings	Fresh garlic and onion. Lemon juice and vinegar. Spices and herbs such as oregano, chili, cumin and basil. Low-sodium bouillon cubes. Salt-free seasoning blends.	Dried onion and garlic. Seasoned salt. MSG. Meat flavorings and tenderizers. Full-sodium bouillon cubes. Seasoning blends that contain salt.

### Additional Resources

- [fda.gov](http://fda.gov)  
Search the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for information on how to read food labels.
- [sodiumbreakup.heart.org](http://sodiumbreakup.heart.org)  
American Heart Association