



CHOICES NUTRITION CONSULTANTS

LOW SODIUM DIET

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What are the health benefits of a low sodium diet?

A low sodium diet is often recommended for those trying to prevent or reduce high blood pressure, diabetics or those with chronic kidney disease. Research also shows that populations with high sodium diets experience higher blood pressure as they age. Low sodium diets also tend to have fewer processed foods and more fruits and vegetables, which carry their own health benefits.

How much sodium should I eat?

The recommended **maximum** sodium intake set by Health Canada is 2300mg per day. However, many of us eat up to three times that! A single fast food combo can contain more than 1500mg of sodium.

What are common sources of sodium?

Baking soda, baking powder, monosodium glutamate (MSG) are sources of sodium that are often overlooked. However, most of our sodium intake comes from eating processed foods. Many processed foods are very high in sodium, even though they may not taste salty; examples include baked goods, frozen dinners, packaged side dishes, and soups. Most restaurant meals are also very high in sodium.

Are all high sodium foods bad for you?

Not always. Sodium's bad rap is linked to the fact that we now eat foods that are far more concentrated in sodium than is available naturally; these foods also tend to be highly processed and poor in nutrients. However, some foods are naturally higher in sodium. Sea salt in its least processed form has a grayish tinge due to its mineral content, including iron, magnesium and potassium. Sea vegetables are also naturally higher in sodium as well as other vital micronutrients such calcium, iron, and vitamins A, C, E and B₁₂. If you are on a low sodium diet and enjoy sea vegetables, you may have to wait until your blood pressure is back to optimum levels before you reintroduce them to your diet. If you are on a no added salt diet, you may be able to enjoy sea veggies in moderation. Talk to your healthcare practitioner for advice.

What can I eat on a low sodium diet?

It depends on the sodium level your healthcare practitioner has recommended. Whole foods such as fresh fruits, vegetables, unsalted nuts and seeds and dried beans are

naturally lower in sodium and should make up the bulk of your diet for better overall health. The DASH diet is a popular diet approach to lowering blood pressure emphasizing fresh fruits and vegetables. You can learn more about the DASH diet at www.dashdiet.org. A no added salt diet (NAS) means simply putting the shaker away, and avoiding obviously salty foods like chips or canned soups. A more restrictive diet, such as 2.3 grams sodium per day, means choosing whole foods and low sodium options of processed foods. At Choices markets, we maintain a listing of low sodium products available in store and label low sodium choices with an orange shelf tag. However, because ingredients are subject to change, please check the nutrition facts panels before you buy.

Why do I crave salty foods and how can I curb the cravings?

Some nutrition researchers believe that a craving for salty foods is linked to exhaustion of the adrenal glands due to chronic stress. If this sounds like you, you may want to explore stress reduction techniques and take more time for yourself. See “The Body Sense Natural Diet” by Lorna Vanderhaeghe for more details (at: www.healthyimmunity.com). A diet rich in whole foods, which are rich in potassium and trace minerals, is also believe to help balance electrolytes and minerals in the body, reducing your salt cravings. A taste for salt is acquired; it can also be unlearned.

How can I eat a low sodium diet without sacrificing flavour?

Your taste buds will adjust to a less salty diet, just as they adjusted a taste for salty foods. Often, salt is used to perk up the flavour of bland, processed foods. Cutting back your salt intake is a great excuse to experiment with different flavours and cuisines. Have a little fun in the spice aisle, or buy a new cookbook and try out some recipes. For more low sodium flavour tips, see our article, *Spice Up Your Life* (http://www.choicesmarket.com/pdfs/nutritionarticles/article_0606a.pdf).

Is a food sodium free if it is labeled “no added salt”

Not necessarily. Some foods are naturally higher in sodium, and will contain sodium even if there is no salt added during processing. For example, Bragg’s Liquid Seasoning has no added salt, but contains 140mg of sodium per half teaspoon! Always check the Nutrition Facts label first, unless the package says “no sodium” or “sodium free”. These are regulated terms that ensure a food has less than 5mg of sodium per serving.

What about Potassium salt substitutes?

Some sodium free salt substitutes simply use potassium instead of sodium. Potassium occurs naturally in fruits, vegetables and whole grains. While extra potassium in your diet can help balance sodium levels, freely using potassium salt substitutes can aggravate kidney conditions. In addition, if you are currently on potassium sparing medication, such as certain diuretics, excess potassium can build and harm your heart. It may be best to stick to tried-and-true no salt added herb mixtures such as Mrs. Dash.

BEYOND THE SALT SHAKER –TIPS FOR REDUCING YOUR SALT INTAKE

1. Avoid hidden sources of salt.

75% of our sodium intake comes from hidden sources, including packaged, prepared and restaurant foods (www.mayoclinic.com)

2. Shop the perimeter of the supermarket.

Fresh foods like fruits, vegetables, lean meats and dairy are naturally lower in sodium. A diet that focuses on these foods has been clinically proven to lower high blood pressure more than just sodium restriction alone (www.dashdiet.com)

3. At restaurants, choose simpler foods without a lot of sauces.

Lean meats with vegetable sides and salads (ask for oil and vinegar at the table instead of dressing) are both good choices.

4. Spice up your life!

Many people use salt because they are uncertain of using the spice cabinet. See our 'Spice Up Your Life' article For more ideas:

http://www.choicesmarket.com/pdfs/nutritionarticles/article_0606a.pdf

5. Have fun with food.

Buy a new exotic cookbook for inspiration, enlist some help and spend an evening cooking up some fun....Thai, Indian, and North African cuisine have wonderful flavours so that you can happily omit the salt.

6. Drop that muffin!

Be aware that baked goods are often remarkably high in sodium – baking soda is a salt!

7. Choose salt free versions of food.

Convenience foods like beans, canned tomatoes and other vegetables often come in salt free versions. Remember: frozen veggies are the more nutritious and naturally salt free!

8. Read labels!

Salt lurks where you least expect it. Reading labels helps you to avoid hidden sources. Just be sure to watch serving size – some seasonings will even use grams instead of milligrams to describe the sodium content to make it look lower than it is.

9. Switch sides.

Certain condiments, such as soy sauce, ketchup and BBQ sauces are very high in sodium. Try making your own mayo for a picnic potato salad. It is quite easy and quick if you do it while the eggs are cooking. Add a little dry mustard or garlic for extra zip! Salsa is another condiment that can be made easily from garden fresh ingredients and can be made ahead.

10. Be careful with salt substitutes.

Many are made with potassium instead of sodium and can aggravate kidney problems. If you are taking a potassium sparing diuretic, an excess of potassium can build and harm the heart. Stick to tried and true, salt free flavouring blends.