

LOWER SODIUM IN YOUR DIET



Lowering your sodium intake can be important for maintaining good health, especially if you have high blood pressure or are at risk for cardiovascular diseases. Here are some strategies to help you reduce sodium in your diet:



1. **Document Your Intake.** Write down everything you ate in one day, and check the mg of sodium in each item on the back of the package or research it online. Although you probably never used the salt shaker, you probably ate processed food with a lot of sodium. Some experts call this “2nd hand sodium,” meaning you did not add it, but the chef or manufacturer added it. The amount can be shocking.
2. **Read Food Labels.** Look for the “Sodium” content in nutrition labels and choose products with lower sodium levels or no-added-salt declarations. Also, check the serving size to ensure you’re not underestimating your sodium intake. The sodium content can vary greatly between similar foods, so a little sleuthing can go a long way to help you lower your sodium intake.
3. **Cook at Home.** Preparing meals at home gives you greater control over the ingredients and the amount of salt used in your dishes. Use herbs, spices, and other flavorings to season your food instead of salt when cooking.
4. **Limit Processed and Packaged Foods.** Many processed and packaged foods are high in sodium. This includes canned soups, frozen dinners, processed meats, and snack foods. Try to minimize your consumption of these items.
5. **Choose Fresh Ingredients.** Opt for fresh fruits, vegetables, and meats, as they generally contain lower amounts of sodium compared to their processed counterparts.
6. **Rinse Canned Foods.** If you use canned vegetables, beans, or other foods, rinse them under cold water before using.
7. **Use Low-Sodium or No-Salt-Added Products.** Look for low-sodium or no-salt-added versions of canned vegetables, tomato products, and broths when shopping.
8. **Limit Condiments.** Condiments like ketchup, soy sauce, and salad dressings can be high in sodium. Use them sparingly or seek out lower-sodium alternatives.
9. **Be Mindful of Fast Food.** Fast food and restaurant meals often contain high sodium levels. When dining out, ask for your dish to be prepared with less salt, request all sauces served on the side, and choose options labeled as “low sodium.”
10. **Cooking Techniques.** Experiment with different cooking methods, such as grilling, steaming, roasting, and baking, which don’t require added salt for flavor. A little sprinkle of lemon juice can add a flavor pop without salt.
11. **Herbs and Spices.** Use herbs and spices like garlic, basil, rosemary, oregano, cumin, and paprika to season your food. These can add flavor without the need for salt. Many stores carry sodium-free herb mixes that are delicious and make cooking easy.
12. **Gradual Reduction.** If you’re used to a high-sodium diet, gradually reduce your sodium intake. Your taste buds will adjust over time.
13. **Read Menus Carefully.** Check restaurant menus for dishes described as “low-sodium” or “heart-healthy.” These options are often prepared with less salt. Look up the salt content of your favorite restaurant’s menu ahead of time so you can make better choices.
14. **Educate Yourself.** Learn about hidden sources of sodium, like baking soda, sodium nitrate/nitrite (found in processed meats), and monosodium glutamate (MSG). Be vigilant about their use in your cooking and food choices.