

Salt, sodium, and blood pressure

Why worry about salt and sodium?

Diets high in salt and sodium are linked to high blood pressure. High blood pressure makes your heart work too hard, leading to heart disease and stroke. If your blood pressure is already higher than it should be, you can help lower it by limiting the salt and sodium you eat.

The American Heart Association recommends everyone should limit salt and sodium to 2,400 mg (milligrams) or less every day. If your blood pressure is mildly to moderately high, aim for keeping the total amount of salt and sodium in your diet under 1,500 mg per day.

What foods are high in sodium?

Food that's too high in sodium is everywhere! A small amount of sodium is natural in many foods. But large amounts are added to products such as snack, fast, processed, and convenience food. There are also high amounts of sodium in cured and smoked meats, such as bacon, ham, salami, and lunch meats.

Most people don't think about how much sodium they're adding when they add salt to their cooking or shake a little onto their plates when they sit down to a meal. Salt from the shaker adds up to about 1/3 of the sodium most people eat each day.

I crave salt! How can I get used to eating food without it?

The good news is most people's taste buds adapt quickly to low-salt eating. Your taste buds will have the chance to discover new fresh tastes that used to be covered up by all that salt.

Tips for going low-salt at home

- Experiment with herbs, spices, and other natural flavors. Garlic and lemon are a great way to bring out the flavors of many foods and may satisfy your craving for something salty.
- Use commercial spice blends, such as Mrs. Dash™. You'll find many choices available on store shelves. Look for products that are labeled "sodium free."
- Try low-salt alternatives to your favorite prepared foods. Many food companies are starting to add low-salt and low-sodium options to their product lines
- Make more food from scratch. That way you control the salt and seasonings.
- Take the salt shaker off the table. That way you won't be as tempted to use it.
- Look for recipes that focus on cooking with fresh, natural foods without added salt.
- Ask your doctor if you can use a salt substitute. Salt substitutes can be high in potassium, which can be a problem for some people.

Tips for going low-salt when you eat out

- Ask that your food be prepared without salt.
- Ask your server to bring sauces, dressings, and relishes on the side.

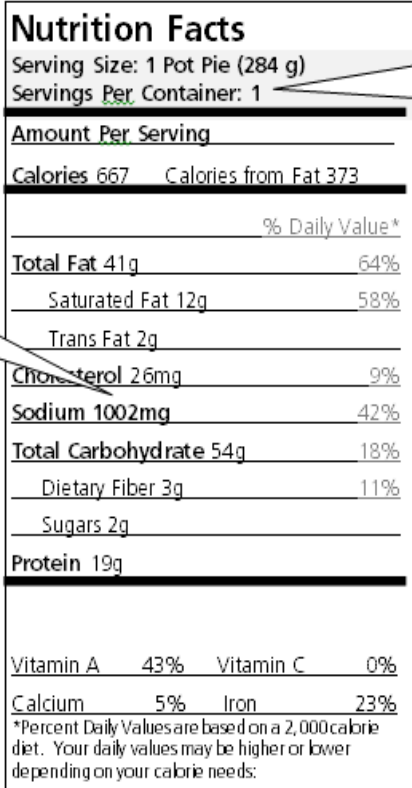
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- Stay away from soups, stews, casseroles, and cured or smoked meats, such as ham and bacon. These are all usually high in sodium.
- If you're at a fast-food or chain restaurant, ask to see the Nutrition Facts information sheet. This will tell you how many milligrams (mg) of sodium is in each menu item.

Learn to read food labels

One important way to know how much salt in sodium is in the foods you eat is to read the Nutrition Facts label that's on all packaged and prepared foods.

Here's an example from a package of frozen chicken pot pies.



The image shows a Nutrition Facts label for a frozen chicken pot pie. Two callout boxes are present: one pointing to the 'Sodium 1002mg' line with the text 'The amount of sodium in each serving', and another pointing to the 'Serving Size: 1 Pot Pie (284 g)' and 'Servings Per Container: 1' lines with the text 'The size of each serving and the number of servings in the package'.

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size: 1 Pot Pie (284 g)	
Servings Per Container: 1	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 667	Calories from Fat 373
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 41g	64%
Saturated Fat 12g	58%
Trans Fat 2g	
Cholesterol 26mg	9%
Sodium 1002mg	42%
Total Carbohydrate 54g	18%
Dietary Fiber 3g	11%
Sugars 2g	
Protein 19g	
Vitamin A 43%	Vitamin C 0%
Calcium 5%	Iron 23%
*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.	

The amount of sodium in one serving size is listed in milligrams (mg). If you eat more than the serving size on the package, you'll also be eating more sodium than the label says. Remember to count that in.