

Shopping for Health: Sodium¹

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Sodium is a mineral found in table salt. While sodium is necessary for the body to maintain fluid balance and blood volume, consuming excess sodium may lead to high blood pressure and increased risk of heart disease or stroke.



How much sodium do I need?

For optimum health, experts recommend that adults not exceed 2,300 mg of sodium, which is the equivalent of about one teaspoon of salt per day (1). Healthy people eat about 1,000–1,500 mg of sodium per day (depending on age).

Individuals with high blood pressure or other health conditions may be put on a sodium restriction by their doctors. Most low-sodium diets limit sodium intake to no more than 1,500 mg per day (1).

What foods are high in sodium?

Processed foods

In the U.S., the main source of sodium in the diet is processed and prepared foods such as canned foods, luncheon meats and many frozen foods. Salt is often added in processing to preserve foods and add flavor (2). For example, one slice of a typical frozen pizza has about 900 mg of sodium. Boxed meals with pre-packaged flavorings

are usually high in sodium as well—a single serving of Hamburger Helper® Cheeseburger Macaroni has 914 mg of sodium. Avoiding processed foods may greatly decrease your daily sodium intake.

High-sodium condiments

Condiments such as salad dressings or soy sauce may significantly increase the sodium content of foods. One tablespoon of soy sauce has about 1,000 mg of sodium (2), and one tablespoon of regular salad dressing has about 200 mg.

Shopping for lower-sodium foods

A low-sodium diet does not require you to cut out specific food groups, but it does require you to be a more conscious shopper. Different brands of the same food may have dramatically different sodium contents, so it is important to *always read food labels*. According to the FDA, low-sodium foods contain 140 mg or less of sodium per serving (3).

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Vegetables

When buying vegetables, consider how they have been processed. Canned vegetables often contain high levels of sodium, added to enhance flavor and shelf life. Choosing fresh or frozen vegetables (without sauce) instead of canned will decrease your daily sodium intake, as long as you do not add salt at the table or during cooking.



Table 1 lists various vegetables and their sodium contents based on how they have been processed (4).

Table 1: Sodium Content of Vegetables*

| | Sodium (mg per 1/2 cup serving) | | | |
|-------------|---------------------------------|------------------|--------|---------------------------|
| | Fresh | Frozen (no salt) | Canned | Canned (low or no sodium) |
| Asparagus | 4 | 1 | 104 | 53 |
| Carrots | 38 | 43 | 295 | 42 |
| Collards | 15 | 43 | 490 | 240 |
| Yellow Corn | 6 | 1 | 286 | 10 |
| Green Beans | 0.5 | 6 | 354 | 10 |
| Peas, Green | 3 | 4 | 214 | 160 |
| Spinach | 12 | 58 | 373 | 88 |

*Adding sauces or high-sodium dressings when preparing vegetables can significantly affect the sodium content.

Bread

Although breads may not always taste 'salty,' they may be high in sodium. **Table 2** lists different types of breads and the amount of sodium in each (4). Low-sodium alternatives to bread may be corn tortillas or unsalted crackers that usually provide less than 100 mg of sodium.



Table 2: Typical Sodium Content of Breads

| Bread | Sodium (mg/slice) |
|------------------|-------------------|
| Italian | 117 |
| Mixed Grain | 127 |
| Pita, white (4") | 150 |
| Pumpernickel | 215 |
| Raisin | 101 |
| Rye | 211 |
| White | 170 |
| Whole Wheat | 148 |

Meat



As with vegetables, meats vary in sodium content depending on their preparation. Processed meats such as luncheon meats and smoked or cured meats are high in sodium. **Table 3** compares the amounts of sodium in fresh

meat roasts to those in processed luncheon meats (4).

| | Roast Meats Sodium mg/serving | Luncheon Meats Sodium mg/serving |
|---------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| Chicken | 43 | 705 |
| Turkey | 40 | 705 |
| Beef | 32 | 630 |
| 2 oz servings | | |

Table 3: Sodium Contents of Roasted Meats and Luncheon Meats

The recommended serving size for most luncheon meats is 2 oz. However, many restaurant-style deli sandwiches provide about 5–6 oz of meat. One 2 oz serving of salami provides almost one third of the recommended daily amount for sodium. If you were to prepare a sandwich with two slices of white bread and 2 oz of luncheon meat, you would have already consumed nearly half of the Adequate Intake for sodium!

Cereal

Ready-to-eat breakfast cereals vary greatly in their levels of sodium. While there



are some low-sodium cereals available, most are high in added salt. Sodium contents range from under 10 mg per serving in shredded wheat to over 350 mg per serving in Kellogg's Raisin Bran. Some low-sodium cereals are shown in **Table 4**.

Table 4: Low Sodium Cereals (<140 mg)

| Cereal | Sodium (mg/serving) |
|--|---------------------|
| Puffed Rice, Puffed Wheat and Toasted Wheat Germ Cereals | 0 |
| Kellogg's Frosted Mini-Wheats® | 4 |
| Kellogg's Mini-Wheats Original® | 5 |
| Quaker® 100% Natural Cereal with Oats, Honey & Raisins | 26 |
| Kellogg's Smacks® | 50 |
| Kellogg's All-Bran Original® | 73 |
| Quaker® Low-Fat Granola with Raisins | 119 |
| Kellogg's Corn Pops® | 120 |
| mg = milligrams | |

Cheese

Processed cheeses are generally high in salt, and should be limited in low-sodium diets. Some grocers carry low-sodium brands, but they may be difficult to find. The sodium contents of various cheeses are listed below in **Table 5**.



Table 5: Sodium Contents of Typical Cheeses

| Cheese | Sodium (mg/oz) |
|------------|----------------|
| Parmesan | 454 |
| American | 422 |
| Blue | 395 |
| Swiss | 388 |
| Provolone | 248 |
| Mozzarella | 178 |
| Cheddar | 176 |

Snacks

Many popular snack foods, such as chips and crackers, are high in added salt. Pretzels have about 500 mg of sodium per serving and a bowl of popcorn has about 350 mg. As with other food groups, some snacks may not taste 'salty' but still contain a lot of sodium. For example, one snack-size Jello® pudding cup has almost 200 mg of sodium. To satisfy the need to munch without the extra salt, you might try raisins, dried fruit, or unsalted nuts as alternatives. Another option may be to look for brands that offer an unsalted version of their snacks. Frito-Lay offers a low sodium line of potato chips called Pinch of Salt® chips, and Snyder's of Hanover sells mini pretzels that are unsalted. Both of these options have only 75 mg of sodium per serving.

Be an informed shopper!

Always be sure to read food labels to check sodium contents. The amount of sodium per serving is usually listed in milligrams (mg) under the heading, Nutrition Facts. The percent daily value is also listed, which is based on a daily intake of 2,000 mg of sodium.



The next time you are grocery shopping, keep the following general guidelines in mind to limit sodium intake:

- Choose fresh or frozen vegetables rather than canned.

- Choose fresh or frozen meats rather than meats that have been smoked, cured, dried, or canned.
- Purchase low-sodium salad dressings instead of regular dressings.
- Choose reduced-sodium soups or prepare homemade soups.
- Avoid pre-packaged biscuit and waffle mixes. Instead, choose low-sodium cereals or oatmeal.
- Substitute dried or fresh herbs for high-sodium condiments.
- Substitute unsalted crackers and corn tortillas for high-sodium snacks and breads.

References

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