



Illustration: © 2004, Terry Boles

Choose fresh foods over processed foods, which are often high in sodium.

For recipe ideas and more information on following a low-salt diet:

American Dietetic Association  
120 S Riverside Plaza, Suite 2000  
Chicago, IL 60606-6995  
800-877-1600  
<http://www.eatright.org>

American Heart Association  
7272 Greenville Ave  
Dallas, TX 75231  
800-242-8721  
<http://www.americanheart.org>

## Following a low-salt diet

❖ If you have high blood pressure, your doctor may recommend that you cut down on salt. A diet that is low in salt (sodium) can help lower blood pressure, which helps reduce the chances of heart disease, kidney disease, and stroke.

How much salt should I have each day?

The average person in the United States consumes 2,500 to 5,000 milligrams of sodium a day, but an adult needs only 500 to 1,000 milligrams. Everyone needs some sodium, because it helps regulate fluid balance and muscle movement. Try to keep your sodium intake under 1,500 milligrams a day unless your doctor recommends a different limit.

What foods should I avoid?

Read the Nutrition Facts label on processed foods (for example, spaghetti sauce), which are generally loaded with salt. Baking soda and some seasonings (for example, monosodium glutamate [MSG], a flavor enhancer often used in Chinese cooking) and condiments (for example, ketchup and soy sauce) are big sodium culprits. Fast foods, salted snack foods, canned broth, and pickled or cured foods, such as dill pickles and ham, are usually very salty. Even bottled water can be high in sodium.

What foods can I eat?

Opt for fresh foods over canned ones. When buying packaged foods, look for those labeled “sodium free,” “reduced sodium,” or “low sodium.” If you do buy canned vegetables, rinse them before cooking.

How can I make food flavorful without salt?

If you gradually reduce the amount of salt you use, your taste buds will adjust, and over time, foods will taste good without so much salt. Seasonings such as cracked red pepper and herbs add flavor without the salt.

Ask your doctor if you can use a salt substitute. These products are usually high in potassium, so people with kidney disease or certain other medical problems may not be able to use them.

Using a cookbook of low-salt recipes can help you learn how to make a variety of flavorful foods without the extra salt.

*This information is not a substitute for medical treatment. Photocopying for patients is encouraged, but all other uses require written permission. To access our Library of Patient Notes on the Web, go to [www.postgradmed.com](http://www.postgradmed.com).*