

Low Sodium Diet: Heart Failure Control

Recommended Limit: Patients with heart failure should limit sodium intake to less than 2,000 milligrams per day (less than one teaspoon per day).

Limiting sodium is one of the most important things that people with heart failure can do. Sodium makes the body hold on to fluid, cause weight gain, worsen symptoms like swelling and shortness of breath, and increase blood pressure. All of these things cause the heart to work harder. People with heart failure do not need to put this extra strain on their hearts.

Basic Sodium Guidelines

1 teaspoon of table salt = 2,300 mgs sodium

Recommended = 2,000 mgs sodium or less/day

For a diet in which you consume 2,000 mg of sodium per day, a sample plan might involve eating 500 mg at breakfast, 150 mg for snacks twice daily, 600 mg for lunch, and 600 mg for dinner.

- Use fresh ingredients and/or foods with no salt added.
- For favorite recipes, you may need to use other ingredients and delete or decrease the salt added. Salt can be removed from any recipe except from those containing yeast.
- Try orange or pineapple juice as a base for meat marinades.
- Avoid convenience foods such as canned soups, entrees, vegetables, pasta and rice mixes, frozen dinners, instant cereal and puddings, and gravy sauce mixes.
- Select frozen entrees that contain 500 mg or less of sodium. However, limit to one of these frozen entrees per day. Check the Nutrition Facts label on the package for sodium content.
- Use fresh, frozen, no added salt canned vegetables, or canned vegetables that have been rinsed before they are prepared.
- Low sodium canned soups may be used.
- Avoid mixed seasonings and spice blends that include salt, such as garlic salt.

Don't use a salt substitute unless you check with your doctor first.

Food Shopping and Preparation Tips

Avoid seasonings that taste salty, such as

- bouillon cubes
- cooking sherry or cooking wine
- chili sauce
- meat tenderizer
- seasoned salts
- soy sauce
- steak sauce
- tamari
- Worcestershire sauce

Use salt-free seasonings, such as lemon juice, lime juice, vinegars, and fresh or dried herbs.

Drain and rinse canned foods before preparing them to remove some of the salt.

Substitute fresh fruits and vegetables for canned or frozen versions with added salt.

Shop for canned or frozen foods with no salt added.

Avoid packaged foods such as soups or rice dishes that come with a packet of powdered seasoning.

Making your own chicken broth is easy – just simmer chicken parts for about 30 minutes with some onion, celery, garlic, pepper and spices. Pick the meat off and reserve for other recipes. Cool the broth overnight in the refrigerator, then remove the layer of fat that forms on the top. Strain the broth through a sieve or cheesecloth. Portion it into 8-ounce cups or containers and freeze. Use it for soups or in place of water when cooking rice, pasta, potatoes or vegetables.

Avoid processed convenience foods

Look for "low-salt" or "low-sodium" labels on cans and packages. This label means the food has 140 milligrams or less sodium per serving. "Very low sodium" means it has 35 mg or less per serving.

"Reduced-salt" or "reduced-sodium" simply means that the product has at least 25 percent less sodium than the original version of the same product. These foods may still have more sodium than you're allowed.

- Canned soups and dry soup mixes
- Canned meats and fish
- Ham, bacon and sausage
- Salted nuts and peanut butter
- Instant cooked cereals

- Salted butter and margarine
- Processed meats, such as deli items and hot dogs
- Prepared baking mixes (pancake, muffin, cornbread, etc.)
- Prepackaged frozen dinners (look for options where one serving has less than 400 mg of sodium)
- Preseasoned mixes (tacos, chili, rices, sauces, gravies, etc.)
- Snack foods (pretzels, potato chips, olives, pickles)
- Cheese
- Tomatoes
- Salad dressings
- Fast food

Pay attention to your serving sizes.

A 2.5-serving can of soup with 200 mg of sodium per serving actually gives you *500 mg of sodium* if you eat the whole thing. That's a real dent in your 2,000 mg-per-day allowance.

Watch for other forms of sodium.

Read the ingredients. Many foods contain more than one form of sodium, such as

- sodium alginate
- sodium sulfite
- sodium caseinate
- disodium phosphate
- sodium benzoate
- sodium hydroxide
- monosodium glutamate or MSG
- sodium citrate.

Caution! Know what's in your medicines.

Some medicines are high in sodium, too – always read the sodium content and warnings before taking an over-the-counter medication. Don't take headache or heartburn medicines that contain sodium carbonate or bicarbonate.

Tips for Dining Out

Appetizers

- Select fresh fruit or vegetables
- Avoid soups and broths
- Stay away from bread and rolls with salty, buttery crusts

Salads

- Select fresh fruits and vegetables
- Avoid pickles, canned or marinated vegetables, cured meats, seasoned croutons, cheeses, salted seeds
- Order salad dressings on the side and use small amounts of them

Main courses

- Select meat, poultry, fish, or shellfish choices that includes the words broiled, grilled or roasted
- Select plain vegetables, potatoes, and noodles
- Ask the server about the low sodium menu choices, and ask how the food is prepared
- Request food to be cooked without salt or monosodium glutamate (MSG)
- Avoid restaurants that do not allow for special food preparation (such as buffet style restaurants, diners or fast food chains)
- Avoid casseroles, mixed dishes, gravies, and sauces
- At fast food restaurants, choose the salad entrees or non-fried and non-breaded entrees (such as a baked potato) and skip the special sauces, condiments and cheese*

* Avoid salted condiments and garnishes such as olives and pickles

Desserts

Select fresh fruits, ices, ice cream, sherbet, gelatin and plain cakes

Low Sodium Seasoning Hints

Low sodium eating does not have to taste bland. Experiment with some of the following seasonings to enhance the natural flavor in food:

Allspice - soups, juices, fruits, spinach, peas, red and yellow vegetables, meat and fish.

Almond extract - fruits.

Anise - sweet breads and rolls, fruit pies and fillings; sparingly in fruit, stews, carrots or beets, cottage cheese.

Basil Sweet - eggs, soups, sauces, salads, tomato dishes, most vegetables, fruit compotes, meats and fish.

Bay Leaf - soups, gravies, meats, poultry, stews, fish, pickled meats and vegetables.

Cinnamon - fruits, breads, chicken, stews, sweet potatoes, carrots.

Lemon Juice - vegetables, salad, meats, fish, poultry.

Marjoram - cottage cheese, omelets, soufflés, vegetables, poultry, fish.

Mint - vegetables, fruits, soups, fish, lamb, veal.

Nutmeg - desserts of all kinds, vegetables, fruits, soups, stews.

Oregano - tomato sauce, eggs, vegetables, poultry.

Paprika - vegetables, meats, fish.

Parsley - salads, vegetables.

Rosemary - vegetables, green salads, potatoes, chicken, veal.

Sage - green beans, meats.

1. In experimenting with herbs, use no more than 1/4 teaspoon of dried herbs or 3/4 teaspoons of fresh herbs for a dish that serves four people.
2. To soups and stews that are to be cooked a long time, add herbs during the last hour of cooking.
3. To hamburgers, meat loaf, and stuffing, add herbs before cooking.
4. On roasts, sprinkle herbs before cooking or top with herb-flavored margarine after cooking.
5. On steaks and chops, either sprinkle herbs while meat is being cooked, or 1 hour before cooking, brush the meat with oil and then sprinkle with herbs.
6. When cooking vegetables or making sauces and gravies, cook herbs along with them.
7. To cold foods such as tomato juice, salad dressings, and cottage cheese, add herbs several hours before serving. You may store these foods in the refrigerator for 3 or 4 hours or overnight.
8. Remember - The correct combinations of herbs and spices for any food are the ones that taste best to you.

[Recipes](#)

If you need further assistance with these recommendations, ask your doctor to refer you to a registered dietitian (R.D.) who can help you with additional nutrition education, cooking suggestions, shopping tips, menu planning, and individualizing a diet to meet your lifestyle needs.

References on file