



Stay Heart Healthy by Breaking up with Excess Sodium

Too much sodium in your system causes your body to retain water. This puts an extra burden on your heart and blood vessels and can raise your blood pressure. People with high blood pressure are more likely to develop heart disease or have a stroke.

Most of us are eating much more sodium than we need, even if we never pick up the salt shaker. That's because more than 75% of the sodium we eat comes from packaged and restaurant foods. That can make it hard to control how much we eat, because it is already added to our food before we buy it. Here are some healthy tips to help you cut excess sodium from your diet:

When at the grocery store or while shopping for food:

- **Choose packaged and prepared foods carefully.** Compare labels and choose the product with the lowest amount of sodium (per serving) you can find in your store. You might be surprised that different brands of the same food can have different sodium levels.
- **Pick fresh and frozen poultry that hasn't been injected with a sodium solution.** Check the fine print on the packaging for terms like "broth," "saline" or "sodium solution." Sodium levels in unseasoned fresh meats are around 100 milligrams (mg) or less per 4-ounce serving.
- **Choose condiments carefully.** For example, soy sauce, bottled salad dressings, dips, ketchup, jarred salsas, capers, mustard, pickles, olives and relish can be sky-high in sodium. Look for a reduced or lower-sodium version.

When preparing food:

- **Use onions, garlic, herbs, spices, citrus juices and vinegars** in place of some or all of the salt to add flavor to foods. Check out our resources links below for delicious and heart healthy recipes.
- **Drain and rinse canned beans** (like chickpeas, kidney beans, etc.) and vegetables – This can cut the sodium by up to 40 percent.
- **Combine lower-sodium versions of food with regular versions.** If you don't like the taste of lower-sodium food just yet, try combining them in equal parts with a regular version of the same food. You'll get less salt and probably won't notice much difference in taste. This works especially well for broths, soups, and tomato-based pasta sauces.
- **Cook pasta, rice, and hot cereal without salt.** You're likely to add other flavorful ingredients to these foods, so you won't miss the salt.
- **Cook by grilling, braising, roasting, searing, and sautéing** to bring out the natural flavor in foods – that will reduce the need to add salt.
- **Incorporate foods with potassium**, like sweet potatoes, potatoes, greens, tomatoes, and lower-sodium tomato sauce, white beans, kidney beans, nonfat yogurt, oranges, bananas, and cantaloupe. Potassium helps counter the effects of sodium and may help lower your blood pressure.

At restaurants:

- **Specify how you want your food prepared.** Ask for your dish to be made without extra salt.
- **Control portion sizes.** Ask if smaller portions are available or share the meal with a friend.
- **Ask about sodium content of the menu items.** A new law requires chain restaurants with 20 or more locations to provide nutrition information, including sodium content, to customers upon request.

Be especially good to your heart this month and make some positive changes for a healthier you.

For more information about heart disease, visit the CDC at www.cdc.gov/heartdisease, the Million Hearts Campaign at <http://recipes.millionhearts.hhs.gov>, the American Heart Association at http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/HealthyLiving/HealthyEating/Recipes/Heart-Healthy-Recipes_UCM_465114RecipeLanding.jsp or contact the West Windsor Health Department at 609-936-8400.

