

# Healthy Eating Guidelines For Lower Sodium (Salt) Eating

Eating foods lower in sodium is an excellent way for you and your family to stay healthy and feel your best. It can also lower your risk of high blood pressure, stroke, heart disease and kidney disease. Most adults need only 1500 mg of sodium per day, and children need even less (1000-1500 mg of sodium per day).

Most of the sodium we eat comes from salt. Processed foods, packaged and ready-to-eat foods, fast foods and restaurant meals are highest in sodium (salt).

Taste is not always a good indicator of how “salty” something is. For example, many breads, breakfast cereals, and bakery products contain sodium even though they don’t taste salty. When trying to lower the amount of sodium in your diet, planning ahead can help you make more healthful choices. The information in this handout will help you make lower sodium choices while shopping for groceries, preparing meals and snacks, and eating out.



## Steps you can take

### Grocery Shopping

1. Choose whole and minimally processed foods.

Great choices from each of the 4 food groups in [Canada's Food Guide](#) are:

- | Vegetables and Fruit – fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables; canned fruits in their own juice; low sodium canned vegetables
- | Grain Products – whole wheat couscous, bulgar, barley, oats, rice, quinoa, pasta, and noodles
- | Milk and Alternatives – milk, yogurt, and fortified soy beverage
  
- | Meat and Alternatives – unseasoned meat, poultry, fish, seafood, and tofu; unsalted nuts and their butters; dried beans, peas, and

lentils; low sodium canned fish and beans; eggs

2. Read and understand the food label when buying processed, "convenience" and pre-packaged foods.

There are different ways to use the information on a food label:

- i The Percent Daily Value (%DV) on the Nutrition Facts Table (NFT) tells you if a food is high or low in sodium.
  - i 5%DV (120mg) or less is "a little" and 15%DV (360 mg) or more is "a lot".
    - n For example, 1 slice of whole grain bread with 5%DV of sodium would be a low sodium food choice.
  - i The %DV helps you to compare products. Serving sizes can vary a lot between products; compare the amount of sodium in a similar serving size.
    - n For example, if you compared canned soups and one had 20%DV sodium per cup and the other had 40%DV per cup, you may decide to choose the one with the lower %DV for sodium.

For more information about reading the Percent Daily Value on the NFT see the Additional Resources section below.

- i Other things to look for on a package to help you make low sodium choices include:
  - i Words such as "sodium-free", "low sodium", "reduced sodium," or "no added salt".
  - i Ingredients such as monosodium glutamate (MSG), soy sauce, or seasonings with salt (e.g. celery salt or onion salt). For more ingredients that are high in salt see the Additional Resources section below. Note: Kosher salt, sea salt, fleur de sel, gourmet salt, and smoked salt all have about the same amount of sodium as table salt.

## Preparing Meals and Snacks

3. Add flavour to your meals without adding sodium

- i Cook most meals from scratch using whole and minimally processed foods from each of the 4 food groups.

- | Flavor your foods without adding salt. Try:
  - | Adding extra amounts of garlic, onion and ginger to the recipe.
  - | Using fresh herbs such as basil, cilantro and mint. Because they are delicate, add them at the end of cooking.
  - | Using fresh and seasonal produce when possible.
  - | Adding crushed garlic and mustard to vinaigrette salad dressings. Lemon, lime and orange juices can also be added.
  - | Toasting unsalted nuts, seeds, or shredded coconut before adding into a recipe. Browning these foods is what adds extra flavor.
- | Try making your own soups, sauces and salad dressings. Find quick and easy recipes at <http://www.cookspiration.com/>.
- | Use smaller amounts and lower sodium versions of store bought sauces, condiments and gravies. For more information see the Additional Resources section below.
- | Enjoy more vegetables and fruit. Use fresh or frozen instead of canned whenever possible.
- | Cook pasta, noodles, rice, hot cereal and other grains without adding salt.
- | Rinse canned vegetables and canned beans, peas and lentils to wash away some of the salt.
- | Taste your food before adding salt.

## Eating Out

### 4. Look for nutrition information before you order.

Many restaurants now offer nutrition information about their menu items. This information may be available on the restaurant's website or at the restaurant on a poster or in a pamphlet. Check the nutrition information of menu items and choose foods with less sodium. Some restaurants are also willing to prepare foods on special request.

## Find your balance.

Following a lower sodium way of eating doesn't mean that every food or every meal needs to be lower in sodium. You can balance higher and

lower sodium choices. For example, if you choose a higher sodium food as part of your meal, make the rest of the meal lower sodium choices. Or, if your whole meal is higher in sodium, choose lower sodium meals for the rest of the day.



## Additional Resources

HealthLinkBC [www.HealthLinkBC.ca](http://www.HealthLinkBC.ca) Medically approved non-emergency health information and advice.

Health Canada: 'The % Daily Value' <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/label-etiquet/nutrition/cons/dv-vq/index-eng.php>

Dietitian Services Fact Sheets available by mail or email (call 8-1-1) or at [www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthyeating](http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthyeating):

- 1 [Lower Sodium \(Salt\) Food Choices](#)

*These resources are provided as sources of additional information believed to be reliable and accurate at the time of publication and should not be considered an endorsement of any information, service, product or company.*



## Notes

Distributed by:

Dietitian Services at HealthLinkBC (formerly Dial-A-Dietitian), providing free nutrition information and resources for BC residents and health professionals. Go to [www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthy-eating](http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthy-eating) or call 8-1-1 (anywhere in BC). Interpreters are available in over 130 languages.

