
Controlling Sodium and Reading Labels

Sodium is an essential nutrient required by the body in small amounts to maintain fluid balance, muscle activity, and nervous system functions. Most Americans consume 3,400 mg or more of sodium per day. *The Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommend limiting sodium intake to **less than 2,300 milligrams (mg)** per day. This is equal to only 1 teaspoon of table salt. Some people with hypertension, heart failure, kidney disease, may need to further reduce their sodium intake to 1,500 to 2,000 mg per day.

Most of the sodium consumed comes from processed or packaged foods. Sodium is used as a food ingredient to cure meats, thicken foods, retain moisture, enhance flavors, and preserve foods. Smart grocery shopping techniques and using food labels can help you reduce the amount of sodium you consume.

Foods to include in your shopping cart

- Vegetables: fresh or frozen
- Fruit: fresh, frozen, canned
- Whole grain breads and cereals
- Lean meats and legumes
- Herbs, spices, and seasonings that contain no sodium or salt
- Unsalted nuts, seeds, and nut butters
- Low fat dairy foods

What should you look for on the food label?

1. Check the serving size.

Remember, if you eat more than one serving, you will get more sodium than the amount listed.

2. Check the sodium content.

Use food labels and packaging to help you select the lowest sodium option.

- Choose foods with 140 mg sodium or less per serving.
- Avoid food with more than 300 mg of sodium per serving.

3. Use % Daily Value (% DV) to quickly compare products

This is the percentage of the Daily Value in a serving of food and shows how much of a nutrient contributes to total daily diet.

- Choose foods with 5% or less Daily Value sodium, these are low sodium.
- Avoid foods with 20% or higher Daily Value sodium, these are high sodium.

4. Use product packaging as a guide.

What it says	What it means
Salt/sodium free	Less than 5 mg of sodium per serving
Very low sodium	35 mg of sodium or less per serving
Low sodium	140 mg of sodium or less per serving
Reduced sodium	At least 25% less sodium than the regular product
Light in sodium or lightly salted	At least 50% less sodium than the regular product
No salt added or Unsalted	No salt is added during process – but these products may not be salt/sodium free unless stated

5. Read the ingredient lists

Labels list the ingredients in order with those that weigh the most appearing first and those that weigh the least appearing last. Choose foods where sodium is listed near the end of the list. Be on the lookout for ingredients that contain sodium:

- Sodium nitrate
- Sodium citrate
- Monosodium glutamate (MSG)
- Sodium benzoate
- Sodium bicarbonate (baking soda)

Regular chicken with noodles soup

Nutrition Facts	
1 serving per container	
Serving size	8 oz
Amount per serving	
Calories	60
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 2g	3%
Saturated Fat 0.5g	3%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 15mg	5%
Sodium 890mg	37%
Total Carbohydrate 8g	3%
Dietary Fiber 1g	4%
Total Sugars 1g	
Protein 3g	
Vitamin A	4%
Vitamin C	0%
Calcium	0%
Iron	2%
* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.	

Low-sodium chicken with noodles soup

Nutrition Facts	
1 serving per container	
Serving size	10.75 oz
Amount per serving	
Calories	160
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 4.5g	7%
Saturated Fat 1.5g	8%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 30mg	10%
Sodium 140mg	6%
Total Carbohydrate 17g	6%
Dietary Fiber 2g	8%
Total Sugars 4g	
Protein 12g	
Vitamin A	30%
Vitamin C	0%
Calcium	2%
Iron	6%
* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.	