Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

2-Gram Sodium Diet

This information explains what you can eat while you're following a 2-gram sodium diet.

About the 2-Gram sodium diet

Sodium is a mineral that helps balance fluids in your body. It's found in almost all foods. On this diet, you limit the total amount of sodium you eat or drink to 2 grams, or 2,000 milligrams (mg), daily. One teaspoon of salt contains 2,300 mg of sodium, so you'll need to take in less than this amount per day.

This diet can be used to manage:

- Heart disease
- High blood pressure
- Kidney disease
- Poor liver function
- Weight gain from water retention (such as swelling in your legs)

Understanding sodium claims

The following table includes sodium claims you'll find on packaged foods. Knowing what these claims mean can help you eat less sodium.

We've also included how many servings of these foods you can eat every day. This is called your recommended daily intake.

Sodium Claim	Meaning	Recommended Daily Intake
"Sodium-free"	Less than 5 mg of sodium per serving	Unlimited
"Salt-free"	Less than 5 mg of sodium per serving	Unlimited
"Low-sodium"	140 mg of sodium or less per serving	Limit to 4 servings daily
"Very low-sodium"	35 mg or less of sodium per serving	Unlimited

Other sodium claims

Here are some other sodium claims you may find on packaged foods and what they mean. While these items may contain less salt than their regular versions, that doesn't guarantee that they're low in sodium.

“Reduced sodium”

- The product contains at least 25% less sodium per serving compared to the regular version of it.

“Light in sodium” or “lightly salted”

- The product contains 50% less sodium per serving compared to the regular version of it.

“Unsalted,” “without added salt,” and “no salt added”

- These products were processed without salt, while normally these products are processed with salt (such as unsalted pretzels versus regular pretzels).
- This doesn’t guarantee that the food is salt or sodium free.

Reading nutrition facts labels

Most of the sodium you eat comes from packaged and prepared foods and drinks, so it’s important to read the nutrition facts labels to find the sodium content. About 75% of sodium that you eat comes from eating packaged and restaurant foods. Although many packaged foods may not taste salty, they may still have high sodium content. Some examples include cereal, bread, and pastries.

On a nutrition facts label, the sodium content is always

listed in milligrams for 1 serving. If you eat or drink 2 servings, you're getting double the amount of sodium. This means that you'll have to multiply the amount of sodium per serving by 2.

Checking the percent daily value for sodium is also a good way to monitor your sodium intake. The daily value for sodium is less than 2,400 mg per day. If the percent daily value is 5% or less, that food is considered low in sodium. If the percent daily value is more than 20%, it's considered high in sodium. Remember, if you have more than 1 serving of a food or drink, you would also need multiply the % daily value for the sodium.

The sodium content is circled on the nutrition facts labels below (see Figure 1). You can see the milligrams of sodium and the percent daily values of sodium per serving. The regular chicken soup has 37% of your daily value of sodium (890 mg), which is high. The low-sodium version has 6% (140 mg), which makes it a better choice. Aim for 140 mg of sodium per serving.

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.

Figure 1. Sodium content on nutrition facts labels

Tips for reducing sodium intake

Eating at home

- Do not add salt to foods while you prepare them or at the table.
- Try adding fresh garlic, onions, lemon juice, or balsamic vinegar to vegetables and salads. This will add more flavor to your food without adding sodium.
- Marinate meat, chicken, or fish in balsamic vinegar, lemon juice, garlic, ginger, or other spices.
- Rinse canned foods, such as tuna, beans and vegetable,

before eating. This will remove some of the sodium.

- If you like spicy food, use hot peppers or hot sauce to season foods. Only use a small amount of hot sauce because it's high in sodium. You can also add salt-free chili powder to foods.
- Try salt-free spice mixes such as Mrs. Dash® and Lawry's® Salt-Free 17 Seasoning.
- Cook more meals at home instead of dining out. This way, you can control the amount of sodium in your diet.
- Make your own blend of ground spices or try these recipes:
  - **Salt-less Surprise**
    - 2 teaspoons of garlic powder
    - 1 teaspoon of dried basil
    - 1 teaspoon of dried oregano
    - 1 teaspoon of powdered lemon rind (or dehydrated lemon juice)
  - **Spice as Nice**
    - 2 teaspoons of dried thyme
    - 1 teaspoon of dried sage
    - 1 teaspoon of dried rosemary
    - 2 teaspoons of dried marjoram

- Put the ingredients of either recipe into a food mill and mix well. Then label and store the mixture in a glass container.

Shopping tips

- Read the nutrition labels on your food and drinks.
  - Compare labels and choose the products with the lowest amount of sodium per serving.
- Choose unprocessed foods, such as fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains (oats, barley, quinoa, and brown rice), and legumes (beans, peas, and lentils). These foods are naturally low in sodium.
- Frozen foods without added sauces usually contain less sodium than those with added sauces. Be sure to check the nutrition label for specific sodium content.
- Choose canned vegetables labeled “no salt added.”
- Do not use salt substitutes unless your doctor approves them. They may contain potassium, which can be harmful to people with certain medical conditions, such as kidney failure.
- Limit the amount of milk, yogurt, and ice cream you eat to 3 (8-ounce) servings daily. These foods are moderately high in sodium.
- Be sure to check the food labels on puddings. Some are

very high in sodium.

- Buy unsalted snacks, such as pretzels, nuts, or chips.

Eating at restaurants

If you're eating at restaurants, there are things you can do to reduce the amount of sodium in your foods.

- Many items in restaurants are high in sodium, especially condiments like gravies, sauces, dressings, and marinated foods.
  - When dining out, order your meal without these additions, or ask for them on the side.
  - Dress your salads with oil and vinegar instead of with prepared dressings.
- Ask to have your food seasoned without salt or products high in sodium.

Chain restaurants that have 20 or more locations have to provide written nutrition information on their menu items, including calories, total fat, calories from fat, sugars, protein, and sodium. You may see this information on posters, tray liners, signs, counter cards, handouts, or kiosks.

Ask for nutritional informational when you're eating at one of these restaurants. You can also look up the nutrition facts on the internet before you go to the restaurant. This

can help you make healthy choices.

High-sodium foods

The following is a list of high-sodium foods. Limit these foods while following your diet. When reading the nutrition facts labels, you'll be surprised how much sodium is in them. Many of these products are available in a low-sodium version, so try to use those.

Food Group	High-Sodium Items to Limit or Avoid
Dairy	• Buttermilk • Instant cocoa mixes, such as Swiss Miss • Cheeses: American, blue cheese, feta, Provolone, Swiss, Edam, and cottage, unless they come in a low-sodium version.
Meats and Fish	• Smoked, cured, dried, pickled, canned, and frozen processed meats • Deli meats such as corned beef, salami, ham, bologna, frankfurters, sausage, bacon, chipped beef, and regular roasted turkey • Kosher meats • Herring, sardines, caviar, anchovies, canned tuna, and smoked salmon • Frozen entrées and TV dinners

Starches and Breads	• Breads, rolls, and crackers with added salt • Soda bread • Ready-to-eat cereals with more than 20% of the Daily Value for sodium • Pizza • Salted chips and pretzels • Prepackaged rice and pasta mixes
Vegetables and Vegetable Juice	• Canned or jarred vegetables and vegetable juices • Pickles • Olives • Sauerkraut • Tomato juice • Regular tomato sauce and tomato paste • Frozen vegetables in butter sauces • Canned and instant soups • Broth or bouillon

Condiments	• Bottled salad dressings • Party spreads, such as onion or artichoke dips and cheese spreads • Dips • Canned gravies and sauces • Bottled salad dressing • Soy sauce, Worcestershire sauce, and chili sauce • More than 1 tablespoon of ketchup • Onion salt, garlic salt, and other seasonings containing salt • Tartar sauce • Cooking wine
Miscellaneous	Check the ingredients on packaged foods to avoid any of these: • Baking powder and baking soda (sodium bicarbonate) • Preservatives, such as sodium nitrate, sodium phosphate, and sodium benzoate • Flavor enhancers, such as monosodium glutamate (MSG) • Sweeteners, such as sodium saccharine • Certain antacid tablets (check the label for sodium content)

Sample menu

The following sample menu includes meals that are within a 2-gram sodium limit.

Meal	Food or Drink	Amount of Sodium (mg)
Breakfast	4 ounces of orange juice	0
	1 hard-boiled egg	60
	2 slices of seven-grain toast	260
	1 teaspoon of unsalted butter	0
	1 tablespoon of jam or jelly	10
	8 ounces of low-fat milk	120
	Coffee or tea	5
Lunch	1 cup of low-sodium split pea soup	50
	Turkey sandwich:	
	• 1 hard roll (3 ½ inches)	310
	• 3 ounces of low-sodium turkey breast	465
	• 1 tablespoon of mayonnaise	80
	• 1 teaspoon of mustard	65
	• Lettuce and tomato	5
	Fresh fruit	0

	12 ounces of plain or flavored seltzer	15
Afternoon Snack	4 graham crackers	160
	2 tablespoons of no salt added peanut butter	10
Dinner	5 ounces of baked salmon	90
	½ cup of broccoli	20
	½ cup of carrots	50
	½ cup of brown rice	5
	8 ounces of iced tea	5
	½ cup of frozen yogurt	65
Evening Snack	1.5 ounces of unsalted pretzels	75
	Fresh fruit	0
Total mg of Sodium		**1925**

Contact information

Department of Food and Nutrition

212-639-7312

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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