

# High Blood Pressure: Eating Foods Low in Salt: Brief Version

## Brief Version

If you have high blood pressure, cutting down on salt can help lower it. Sodium is the part of salt that causes the problems. You should have no more than 2300 milligrams (mg) of sodium a day. One teaspoon of salt has about 2300 mg of sodium.

Our taste for salt is mainly a habit. When you use less salt, your taste starts to change. After a while, food tastes better without salt than it did with it.

## You can use less salt.

There are 2 main ways to use less salt:

- Do not add salt to your foods.
- Choose foods that have less salt or sodium.

Read the labels on canned and prepared foods. Look for any form of salt or sodium. Remember that baking soda, MSG, and baking powder have sodium, too.

Watch what you eat when you eat out. Fast foods and other restaurant foods are often very high in salt. A lot of the salt in your diet can come from food you eat away from home.

When cooking or preparing foods, stay away from:

- ketchup, prepared mustard, pickles, and olives
- soy sauce, steak or barbecue sauce, chili sauce, and Worcestershire sauce
- bottled salad dressings
- bouillon cubes
- self-rising flour and biscuit mixes.

Don't eat foods high in salt, such as:

- cured meats or fish (for example, bacon, luncheon meats, and canned sardines)
- canned vegetables, soups, and other packaged foods
- cheeses and buttermilk
- salted nuts and peanut butter
- salted crackers, chips, popcorn, and pretzels
- salted margarine or butter
- instant cooked cereals.

You can get many of these foods with no or low salt. Read the labels. You may also want to try some of the many frozen low-salt and low-fat dinners.

If you need to eat very little salt, you may need help in planning your meals. Talk to your healthcare provider or dietitian. Remember there are many healthy ways to add taste without adding salt.

Ask your healthcare provider about using salt substitutes. Many salt substitutes have potassium. You may need to watch how much potassium you use.

### **You can learn to cook without using salt.**

You can be creative and make food look and taste great. It's a good idea to eat fresh foods as much as you can. Also, plain frozen fruits and vegetables usually do not have added salt.

Instead of salt, there are many kinds of things you can use to flavor your foods. You can try different herbs, spices, onions, garlic, tomatoes, lemon or lime juice, or wine.

### **Take care of yourself.**

Find out more about eating healthy foods. You can:

- Go to the library.
- Call the American Heart Association (1-800-242-8721).
- Ask your healthcare provider or dietitian for more information about eating right.
- Look at your bookstore for low-salt cookbooks.
- Remember to read food labels to find out how much salt and fat are in the foods.

Take time to plan and enjoy your meals. It can be fun to learn to cook new dishes. And it's great to know that when you use less salt, you will lower your blood pressure.

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