

## Stymied by Low-sodium Needs? Some Simple Steps to Cut Sodium



Salt is simply everywhere, from frozen dinners to canned soup, and fast food to fine dining fare. Even if you never touch the salt shaker while cooking or sitting down to eat, you may still be consuming a high salt intake that might work against you if you have heart disease. For anyone, following a low-sodium diet can be a challenge.

Many health conditions – most notably high blood pressure or heart failure – call for reducing your daily consumption of sodium, the main ingredient in salt. If you've recently suffered a heart attack or been diagnosed with heart

failure, your doctor likely wants you to reduce your sodium intake because heart failure causes the body to retain sodium. Extra sodium can cause fluid to build up in your body, and extra fluid makes your heart work harder – not a good thing for a muscle already under strain.

A low-sodium diet means restricting your daily sodium intake to just 2,000 to 3,000 milligrams (mg) – a little more than one teaspoon per day. We get sodium either from table salt or from other food items. Many of us get sodium and salt confused. Sodium is a component of table salt and represents about 40 percent of the content of salt. Certain kinds of salt, like sea salt, have a bit less sodium, but a low-sodium salt does not exist. Beyond table salt, sodium is a mineral found in many foods. Fortunately, FDA-mandated food labels now prominently list the amount of sodium in foods.

So how can you cut back on sodium? The Heart Failure Society of America, an organization aimed at improving quality of life for people diagnosed with heart failure and helping prevent the condition in those at risk, offers a few helpful tips:

### **1. Lose the salt shaker.**

If you stop adding salt while you cook or when you sit down at the table, you can cut your sodium intake as much as 30 percent. Instead of adding salt to make food taste better, substitute more healthful seasonings, like black, cayenne or lemon pepper; herbs like garlic, onion powder, dill, parsley and rosemary; lemon juice and flavored extracts like vanilla or almond.

### **2. Choose low-sodium versions of favorite foods.**

Instead of preparing a country ham – which is very high in salt content – cook a fresh, lean pork roast. Substitute freshly cooked and sliced chicken, turkey, roast beef or pork for lunch meats that usually contain a lot of sodium. Instead of buying salty canned soups, chop up fresh veggies and cooked meats, toss them in the slow cooker and season with herbs and spices. If you must buy canned soups or vegetables, look for labels that say “sodium-free,” “no salt,” “low sodium,” “reduced sodium” or “unsalted.”

### **3. Pick foods naturally low in sodium.**

Generally, you can eat as much fresh food as you want without counting the sodium content. Fresh fruits and vegetables, including freshly squeezed fruit and vegetable juices, have very little sodium. The same is true for fresh meat, poultry and fish. If you are not eating fresh foods, choose other low-sodium foods as much as possible, such as canned fruits, plain frozen vegetables and dried beans, peas, rice and lentils.

### **4. Learn to read food labels.**

By reading food labels, you can learn which foods are high and low in sodium. As a rule, most processed foods, whether they are frozen, canned or boxed, are high in sodium, but don't rule them out entirely. Some packaged foods are available in low- or no-salt versions.

It can be difficult to change your eating habits, but try introducing changes slowly instead of all at once. It may take weeks before you enjoy the taste of low-sodium foods, but your tastebuds will adjust. Be patient. Eventually you won't even miss the salt.

To learn more about heart failure and how to manage your condition, log on to the Heart Failure Society of America's Web site: [www.abouthf.org](http://www.abouthf.org). (posted ARA Content 12/08)