Healthy Eating: How to Read Food Labels to Cut Back on Sodium

Reading food labels will help you cut back on sodium (salt). Food labels list the amount of sodium for each serving.

Try to limit your sodium intake to less than 2,300 milligrams (mg) a day. That is less than 1 teaspoon of salt a day, including all the salt you eat in foods you cook or in packaged foods. It's recommended that some people further reduce their sodium intake to less than 1,500 mg a day. This includes people who are 51 or older, are black, or have high blood pressure, diabetes, or chronic kidney disease.

Foods high in sodium
Packaged and processed foods have a lot of sodium.

Avoid these foods, or eat only small amounts:
- Smoked, salted, and canned meat, fish, and poultry
- Ham, bacon, hot dogs, and lunch meats
- Hard and processed cheeses
- Regular peanut butter (you can buy unsalted peanut butter)
- Crackers (unless they are low-sodium)
- Frozen prepared meals
- Canned and dried soups and broths
- Canned vegetables
- Snacks, chips, and pretzels
- Pickles and olives
- Ketchup, mustard, and steak sauce
- Soy sauce
- Salad dressings
- Pre-seasoned rice, pasta, or other side dishes

Foods low in sodium
Some processed foods are made with less sodium.

Look for foods labeled "no salt added." Foods labeled "sodium-free" have less than 5 mg of sodium in a serving. Foods called "low-sodium" have less than 140 mg of sodium in a serving.

A food labeled "light sodium" has less than half the sodium than normal. Foods labeled "reduced-sodium" may still have too much sodium.
Choose these foods:
• Fresh or frozen fruits
• Fresh or frozen vegetables
• Unsalted nuts
• Dry beans or lentils, cooked without salt
• Pasta, rice, or other grains made without salt
• Whole-grain breads
• Fish, meat, and poultry made without salt

• Unsalted crackers or chips

Other tips
Use garlic, lemon juice, onion, vinegar, herbs, and spices instead of salt.
Make your own salad dressings and sauces without adding salt.
Use less salt (or none) when recipes call for it. You can use half the salt a recipe calls for without losing too much flavor.