

GRAB AND GO LESSON

Strategies for Reducing Sodium

Nutrition and Meal Management |
Nutrition Needs

Purpose: This handout provides different ways to reduce sodium when planning menus.

Sodium is an electrolyte that is regulated by your kidneys. It helps balance the body's fluids and is vital for muscle function. Table salt is the primary source of sodium in American diets.

The average child consumes 3,100 mg per day, more than double the recommendation! According to the American Heart Association, children ages 6–18 receive 15% of their sodium at breakfast, 30% at lunch, 39% at dinner, and 16% at snack time.

Approximately 75% of the salt we consume is added by manufacturers during food processing. It is important to know the effects of sodium, typical foods with high levels of sodium, and strategies for reducing sodium intake.

Consuming too much sodium can lead to high blood pressure — even in children. In the United States, 1 out of 6 children have elevated blood pressure. Excess sodium intake can also increase the risk of heart attack, stroke, and heart failure. Usually, if someone has high blood pressure as a child, they will also have it as an adult. When children are young, they quickly develop preferences for particular tastes, especially sweet and salty flavors. Limit the amount of sodium in their diets from the start. If they already have a diet high in sodium, slowly decrease the amount over time until they are at healthy levels.

Sodium can be found in every food. About half of the sodium in the United States comes from food items such as burgers, sandwiches, and tacos; rice, pasta, and grain dishes; pizza; meat, poultry, and seafood dishes, and soups. Processed and prepared foods are almost always high in sodium. To combat this, preparing food at home is the best way to control sodium levels. If you are going to buy processed or prepared foods, read the Nutrition Facts label and select a item lower in sodium.

Check out the table below for some common foods and their average amount of sodium. Remember, the recommendation for one day is 1,500 milligrams.

Food	Sodium Range (mg)	Food	Sodium Range (mg)
1 fast-food cheeseburger	710–1,690	1 slice of white bread	80–230
1 corn dog (plain)	350–620	1 oz potato chips (plain)	50–200
3 oz frozen chicken nuggets	200–570	3 oz turkey deli meat	450–1,050
1 slice frozen cheese pizza	370–730	1 oz slice American cheese	330–460

Now let's look at a typical sandwich and see how quickly the sodium adds up.

Top slice of bread	220 mg
1 teaspoon mustard	120 mg
1 leaf lettuce	2 mg
1 slice of cheese	310 mg
6 thin slices of turkey	690 mg
Bottom slice of bread	220 mg
Total	1,542 mg

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This example sandwich exceeds the recommended amount of sodium for the entire day. Being aware of how much sodium is in foods is one of the best ways to make smart health decisions. Use some of the strategies below to reduce your sodium intake.

Tips for Success

- Use the Nutrition Facts label to compare sodium in packaged foods and beverages.
- Buy low-sodium, reduced-sodium, or no-salt-added products.
- Look for fresh, frozen, or canned vegetables without added sauces or seasonings.
- Steaming vegetables is an easy way to prepare vegetables without adding salt.
- Limit sauces, dips, and condiments in meals as they are often high in sodium.
- Choose fresh or frozen poultry, seafood, and lean meats instead of prepared or ready-to-eat products.
- Limit how often cured and processed meats are served.
- Use meat alternates in mixed dishes or as a replacement as they are usually low in sodium.
- Prepare meals at home to control the sodium in your food.
- Add herbs and spices instead of salt to recipes and dishes.
- If salt is necessary for a recipe, use the least amount possible.
- Model healthy eating for children.

References

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