

Sodium and your health

What is sodium?

Sodium is a mineral found naturally in foods as well as in table salt. It is also added to many foods during processing.

We need small amounts of sodium for health, but eating too much can increase the risk of high blood pressure and heart disease. Most adults only need 1,500 mg of sodium per day. Many people living in Canada eat much more than they need. To decrease the risk of chronic disease, aim for about 1,500 mg per day and limit your intake to below 2,300 mg.

If you have high blood pressure, aim to reduce your sodium intake to 2,000 mg or less per day.

Children have different recommended sodium intake by age:

- 1 to 3 years 800 mg per day
- 4 to 8 years 1,000 mg per day
- 9 to 13 years 1,200 mg per day

What foods in Canada provide the most sodium?

Although many foods contain sodium, most of the sodium we eat comes from highly processed foods. The main sources of sodium include:

- Breads, crackers, muffins, cookies, desserts and granola bars
- Pizza, lasagna, prepared salads, frozen potatoes, frozen appetizers and entrees
- Deli meats, sausages, canned meats, chicken wings, burgers and meatballs

- Cheese
- Packaged and canned soups
- Sauces and condiments

If you eat these foods, eat them less often and in smaller amounts and look for lower sodium versions.

What else can I do to lower my intake of sodium?

Prepare your own meals and snacks

Prepare meals at home using foods that have little to no sodium or salt. Lower sodium items include:

- Vegetables and fruit: fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables, canned fruits in their own juice, low-sodium canned vegetables
- Whole grains: oats, quinoa, barley, brown or wild rice, and whole grain pasta
- Protein foods:
 - Dried or low-sodium canned beans, peas and lentils. Rinse canned beans to wash away some of the sodium
 - Fresh or low-sodium canned fish
 - Unseasoned fresh or frozen lean meat, poultry, seafood and tofu
 - Unsalted nuts, seeds and their butter
 - Eggs, milk, yogurt and fortified soy beverage

Try making your own soups, sauces and salad dressings. Find quick and easy recipes in the “Recipes” section of Canada’s Food Guide: <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/>.

Use less added salt

All types of salt including kosher salt, sea salt, fleur de sel, smoked salt and Himalayan salt are high in sodium. Instead, flavour your food without adding salt:

- Add garlic, onion and ginger to a recipe
- Use fresh or dried herbs and spices such as basil, cilantro and mint
- Add garlic, mustard, lemon, lime or orange juice to homemade vinaigrette salad dressings
- Toast unsalted nuts, seeds, or shredded coconut before adding into a recipe

Make healthier restaurant and fast-food choices

Restaurant or takeaway food is often high in sodium. If available, check the nutrition information and choose dishes with less sodium.

Other tips for choosing restaurant and fast food include:

- Ask if the food can be made with less salt
- Order smaller portions
- Share a dish with someone or save half for another meal
- Ask for sauces and dressings on the side. Use smaller amounts

Look for sodium on food labels

Most packaged foods have a Nutrition Facts table that shows how much sodium is in the food.

Use the Nutrition Facts table to help you choose foods lower in sodium. The percent daily value (% DV) shows you if the food has a little or a lot of sodium:

- 5% DV or less is a little

- 15% DV or more is a lot

Most packaged foods that have more than 15% DV sodium have a front-of-package nutrition symbol that states 'high in sodium'. The symbol is black and white and has a magnifying glass.



Look at the food package for the following words: "sodium-free", "low sodium", "reduced sodium," or "no added salt" to help you find lower sodium choices.

How much sodium do I eat?

To estimate how much sodium you consume, write down the amount all the foods and beverages you eat and drink in one day. Then add up the total sodium you consumed. Look for the sodium amount on the Nutrition Facts tables. You can also use the table which follows, or you can find the sodium content of a specific food in the [Canadian Nutrient File](#).

What about salt substitutes?

Some salt substitutes contain potassium. If you have kidney disease or take medication to lower blood pressure, consult with your health care provider before using a salt substitute with potassium.

For more information

Canada's food guide: Limit highly processed foods <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/healthy-eating-recommendations/limit-highly-processed-foods/>

Food sources of sodium

Food	Serving size	Sodium (mg)
Vegetables and fruit		
Tomato sauce, canned	125mL (½ cup)	614
Sauerkraut, canned	125mL (½ cup)	496
Pizza sauce, canned	125mL (½ cup)	463
Pickles (sour)	1 small	447
Tomato juice, canned	125mL (½ cup)	325
Olives	4 olives	248
Potatoes, instant, mashed	125mL (½ cup)	191
Vegetables, canned	125mL (½ cup)	184
Vegetables, canned, no salt added	125mL (½ cup)	25
Tomato juice, canned, no salt added	125mL (½ cup)	13
Fresh and most frozen vegetables contain very little sodium. All fruit including fresh, frozen, dried and canned is low in sodium.		
Grains		
Bread stuffing, dry mix	125mL (½ cup)	506
Macaroni and cheese, box mix	125ml (½ cup)	459
Rice mix, seasoned	125mL (½ cup)	365
Bagel, whole wheat	½ bagel	288
Crackers, saltine	10 saltines	282
Bread roll, whole wheat	1 roll	224
Muffin, commercial	1 small	222
Bread, whole wheat, commercial	1 slice	213
Hot cereal, instant	175mL (¾ cup)	194-241
Pancake, frozen	1 pancake	189
Granola bar	1 bar	128
Cold cereal	125ml (½ cup)	102-158
Brown rice	125mL (½ cup)	5
Oatmeal	175mL (¾ cup)	3
Grains cooked without salt such as rice, barley, quinoa, wheat and whole grain pasta are low in sodium.		
Protein foods		
Prosciutto	75g (2 ½ oz)	1,458
Bacon	75g (2 ½ oz)	1,263
Pepperoni	75g (2 ½ oz)	939
Processed cheese slices	50g (1 ½ oz)	907

Baked beans, plain, canned	175mL (¾ cup)	644
Sausage, chorizo	75g (2 ½ oz)	540
Frozen meatballs	75g (2 ½ oz)	500
Feta cheese	50g (1 ½ oz)	458
Chicken nuggets	75g (2 ½ oz)	420
Cottage cheese, regular	125mL (½ cup)	368
Mozzarella cheese	50g (1 ½ oz)	355
Cheddar cheese	50g (1 ½ oz)	322
Fish sticks	75g (2 ½ oz)	302
Salmon, canned, salted	75g (2 ½ oz)	293-306
Buttermilk	250mL (1 cup)	272
Chicken, rotisserie with seasoning	75g (2 ½ oz)	235-544
Almonds, salted	60 mL (¼cup)	174
Egg, whole	2 eggs	125
Milk, 2%	250mL (1 cup)	121
Salmon, baked	75g (2 ½ oz)	100
Chicken breast, roasted	75g (2 ½ oz)	53
Tofu, regular	175mL (¾ cup)	10
Chickpeas, canned, no salt added	175mL (¾ cup)	8
Almonds, unsalted	60 mL (¼cup)	1
Fresh and unprocessed frozen meat, poultry and fish, dried beans and lentils, unsalted nuts and seeds as well as nut butters are low in sodium.		
Other		
Table salt	5mL (1 tsp)	2,373
Soy sauce	15mL (1 Tbsp)	1,244
Frozen pizza, meat and vegetable	1 slice (150g)	827
Beef broth	250mL (1 cup)	812
Chicken noodle soup, canned	250mL (1 cup)	740
Teriyaki sauce	15mL (1 Tbsp)	700
Taco seasoning	15mL (1 Tbsp)	625
Salsa, ready to serve	60mL (¼ cup)	463
Caesar dressing	15mL (1 Tbsp)	180
Ketchup	15mL (1 Tbsp)	138
Sports drink	250mL (1 cup)	101
Soft margarine or butter, salted	15mL (1 Tbsp)	93-95
Soft margarine or butter, unsalted	15mL (1 Tbsp)	2

g = gram, mL = millilitre, Tbsp = tablespoon, tsp = teaspoon

Source: [Canadian Nutrient File](#)