

Sodium and Spices

Many people think sodium and salt are the same thing, but they are different. Sodium is a mineral that occurs naturally in foods or is added during manufacturing—or both. Table salt is a combination of sodium and chloride.

One of the first steps in controlling high blood pressure is to reduce the extra sodium in your diet. The American Heart Association recommends no more than 2,300 milligrams (mg) a day, but the ideal limit is 1,500 mg per day for most adults, especially for those with high blood pressure. Cutting back by just 1,000 mg a day can improve your blood pressure and heart health.

Limit Foods High in Sodium

Regularly eating high-sodium foods will result in more than 2,000 mg per day, even if you don't add table salt. Use this list of common high-sodium foods and products to see if you are eating too much sodium. If so, ask a registered dietitian or your local Extension agent for information about reading food labels and replacing high-sodium foods.

- Table salt (1 teaspoon provides about 2,300 mg of sodium)
- Seasonings that contain salt (like celery salt, garlic salt, onion salt, season-all, “lite salt”)
- Sauerkraut or other vegetables prepared in brine (pickles)
- Regular canned soups
- Breads and rolls with salted toppings
- Potato chips, corn chips, pretzels, saltines, salty crackers, and salted popcorn
- Salty or smoked meats (like bacon, bologna, chipped or corned beef, frankfurters, ham, meats koshered by salting, luncheon meats, salt pork, sausage, smoked neck bones, smoked ham hocks, smoked turkey, and canned or pickled meats)
- Salty or smoked fish (like anchovies, caviar, salted and dried cod, herring, and sardines)
- Processed cheese, cheese spreads, or cheeses such as Roquefort, Camembert, Gorgonzola, and Parmesan
- Salted nuts, olives, bacon, and bacon fat
- Peanut butter
- Bouillon, ketchup/catsup, chili sauces, meat extracts, meat sauces, meat tenderizers, monosodium glutamate (MSG), prepared mustard, relishes, many sauces
- Antacids containing sodium (such as Alka-Seltzer)
- Most fast foods and prepackaged foods
- Canned or frozen entrees (sometimes have lower fat and increased salt)

Replace Sodium with Spices and Herbs

No-salt seasonings add a unique flavor to your dishes without adding a bunch of salt. Use more herbs and spices, and look for seasonings that end in “powder,” like garlic, chili, and onion powders. Spice up your foods with the substitutions on the back page.

Spice/Herb	Flavor	Try With
allspice	clove, cinnamon, nutmeg	pot roast, meat loaf, combined casseroles, curries, desserts, vegetable soup
anise	strong licorice taste and flavor	savory dishes like seafood soups and stews, seafood kebobs, pork
bay leaf	heavy; use sparingly	soups, stews, roasts, poultry, fish
basil	mildly peppery with trace of mint and clove	tomato sauces, salad dressings, poultry, fish, Italian/Mediterranean dishes
caraway seed	licorice flavor; lightens flavor of heavy foods	breads, cooked cabbage, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, borscht soup, goulash, sausage, spareribs
cayenne	hot and spicy	most foods depending on preference
chervil	warm, part-anise, part-parsley flavor	omelets, green beans
chives	mild, sweet onion taste	salads, omelets, potatoes
cinnamon	sweetly spicy, warm	sweet potatoes, baked dishes, apples, oatmeal
curry powder	blend of spices (from India)	soups, rice casseroles, chicken, sauces
dill	slightly sweet with sharp tang	fish, eggs, carrots, cauliflower, spinach, apples, potatoes, cucumbers, dips/sauces
garlic	strong, pungent	meat, fish, poultry, salads, sauces, soups
ginger	hot, zesty, and biting yet sweet and warm	chocolate, ice cream, fruit, chicken, ham, carrots, tea, smoothies
marjoram	mild oregano taste, hint of balsam	stuffing, eggplant, squash
mint	cool, refreshing, sweet	tea, fruit, carrots, peas, dressings, lamb
oregano	pungent, peppery, slightly bitter	tomatoes, mushrooms, poultry, lentils
paprika	sweet, slightly fruity, mild heat	rubs, marinades, pork chops, chicken, stews, garnish for egg and fish dishes
parsley	gentle flavor	chicken, shellfish, pasta, potatoes
rosemary	bold, piney	meat, fish, poultry, sauces, stews, vegetables
sage	pleasantly bitter, lemony zest	breads, stuffing, potatoes, vegetables
sesame	rich, nutty flavor	chicken and other meats, warm salads, salad dressings
summer savory	light, sweet, peppery tang	beans, lentils, vegetable juices
tarragon	similar to anise	chicken, fish, vegetables, vinaigrette
thyme	pleasant, fresh taste with faint clove aftertaste	poultry, salad dressings, dried beans, soups
turmeric	earthy, slightly bitter	rice, curry, stews, tea

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