

Low-Sodium Recipe and Cooking Tips

Salt may add flavor to your food, but getting too much of it can also cut years from your life. Studies have linked a high-salt diet to increased risk of high blood pressure, which increases the risk of stroke and heart disease. Research also has shown that reducing the salt in your diet may help lower those risks.

Low-Sodium Meals: How to Cut the Salt in Your Cooking

It is possible to limit the salt in your meals without sacrificing the flavor of your food. Here are three low-sodium cooking tips to help you make healthy, delicious meals that are good for your heart:

- **Keep it real.** Processed foods are often loaded with extra salt. That's because salt acts as a preservative. Cooking your own meals from scratch is the best way to control how much sodium goes into your food. Cookbooks and the Internet are full of easy low-sodium recipes that take all of the guesswork out of cooking. Opt for fresh fruits or vegetables instead of canned. Choose fresh poultry, fish, and meat instead of processed or smoked varieties. For side dishes, make brown rice or whole baked potatoes instead of instant or flavored rice or mashed potatoes. If you have to use canned foods, such as tuna, veggies, or beans, rinse the contents beforehand to wash away some of the sodium.
- **Become a label reader.** Scour every food label for sodium content. Look for products labeled "sodium-free" (less than 5 milligrams of sodium per serving), "very low sodium" (35 milligrams or less per serving), or "no salt added." Watch out for broths, dressings, soy sauce, bouillon cubes, meat tenderizers, seasoned salts, and condiments (mustard, ketchup, barbecue sauce), which are notoriously high in salt. Watch for additives such as monosodium glutamate (MSG), baking soda, baking powder, and sodium benzoate, which are all sodium compounds.
- **Don't follow directions.** When a recipe calls for even a pinch of salt, replace it with another herb or spice. You can try rosemary, marjoram, thyme, tarragon, onion or garlic powder, curry powder, pepper, nutmeg, cumin, ginger, cilantro, bay leaf, oregano, dry mustard, or dill.

Spicing Up Your Low-Sodium Menu

Salt-free doesn't have to mean taste-free. You can substitute dozens of different seasonings and ingredients to spice up to your low-sodium meals. Here are just a few ideas:

- Marinate chicken breasts or pork chops in lemon juice, orange juice, or wine.
- Roll fish in sesame seeds before baking.
- Spice up beef with a mixture of onion, peppers, sage, and thyme.
- Toss in a few fruits and vegetables, such as dried apricots, raisins, red pepper, or yellow pepper for extra flavor.
- Simmer carrots in cinnamon and nutmeg.
- Sprinkle some dill and parsley onto potatoes before roasting.
- Add a dash of chili powder to corn.
- Toss your pasta with fresh chopped garlic.
- Replace salted butter with unsalted butter.
- When cooking with cheese, opt for fresh mozzarella or cheeses labeled "low-sodium."
- Try a commercial salt-free seasoning blend (such as Mrs. Dash), or make your own mix with this recipe from the American Heart Association:
 - 1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper
 - 1 teaspoon mace, ground
 - 1 teaspoon basil, ground
 - 1 teaspoon onion powder
 - 1 tablespoon garlic powder
 - 1 teaspoon black pepper, ground
 - 1 teaspoon thyme, ground
 - 1 teaspoon sage, ground
 - 1 teaspoon parsley, dry flakes
 - 1 teaspoon marjoram
 - 1 teaspoon savory, ground