

Southern Indiana Nephrology and Hypertension

Salt Restriction

When we talk about limiting salt in your diet, we are referring to **sodium**. Sodium is an element found in nature and is used to flavor food. It is usually present as sodium chloride, which is table salt. It can however come in different forms, such as monosodium glutamate, MSG, frequently found in Asian foods. Unfortunately, the large amounts of sodium eaten by the average person in the US, is likely contributing to many of the medical problems we see today.

Limiting the amount of salt in your diet has many **beneficial effects**. If you have high blood pressure, it makes your blood pressure medicines work better. If you are on a diuretic (water pill), limiting your salt intake prevents potassium loss, and may lessen cramping. It lowers your chances of dying from a stroke, lowers your risk of stomach cancers, lowers your risk of osteoporosis and lowers your risk of kidney stones. With all these benefits, it is easy to see why we think almost everyone should limit their salt intake.

Beginning on a **low salt diet** does not just mean getting rid of the table salt (although that is a start). Unfortunately, up to 85% of the salt we take in comes from salt already present in the food we choose. Condiments, like ketchup, steak sauce, and soy sauce, contain large amounts of salt, as do many snack foods, such as chips and pretzels. Processed food like soups and luncheon meats may actually contain an entire day's salt in them!

For most of our patients, we encourage limiting **the total salt** in a day to 1,500 mg or 1.5 grams. You can look at the nutrition facts label on food to see how much sodium is in a serving. Be careful to pay attention to **servings size**, which may be a much smaller portion than we tend to eat. Sodium free means only very small amount of salt. Very low sodium generally refers to 35 mg or less, whereas low sodium may still contain up to 140 mg per serving.

On the back is a list of some high salt foods and acceptable substitutes. As for spicing up your food, we recommend Mrs. Dash or any actual spices such as basil, rosemary, thyme, allspice, etc. Unfortunately, salt substitutes and many low-salt foods are not always a good choice, since these usually contain potassium chloride. We will often need to have you limit your potassium also if you have kidney disease or are on certain medicines like ACE inhibitors, ARB's or spironolactone.

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High Salt Foods	May Substitute With:
Table salt, sea salt, garlic or onion salt, lemon salt, meat tenderizer, bouillon	Mrs. Dash (any variety), pepper, fresh garlic or onion, vinegar, lemon
Barbecue sauce, soy sauce, ketchup, steak sauce, salad dressing	Low-salt ketchup, mustard, fresh ground horseradish. Make your own dressing with oil, vinegar & Mrs. Dash
Potato chips, pretzels, crackers, nuts, popcorn	Unsalted popcorn, unsalted pretzels, unsalted nuts. Make your own chips by toasting tortillas
Hot dogs, luncheon meats, sausage, bacon, cured ham	Low salt deli meats (less than 140 mg of sodium per serving), fresh turkey or fresh chicken breasts
Soups, canned vegetables, vegetable juice	Homemade soup, very low salt soup, fresh or frozen vegetables
Fast foods, frozen dinners, canned & boxed pasta meals	Homemade foods

We realize that changing from the average American diet with 3000-6000 mg of salt per day to a low salt diet with 1500 mg per day can be challenging. We will often recommend that you see our **dietitian** who can review your diet and make specific recommendations.

Also, please remember that many low-salt foods or salt substitutes contain potassium chloride. Many of our patients need to limit their potassium also, so these may not be good options either.

If you have any questions or are confused, please ask us first!