

# How to Read a Food Label to Limit Sodium: Care Instructions

## Overview

---

Limiting sodium can be an important part of managing some health problems.

Processed foods, fast food, and restaurant foods are the major sources of dietary sodium. The most common name for sodium is salt. Most packaged foods have a Nutrition Facts label. This will tell you how much sodium is in one serving of food.

**Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety.** Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

## How can you care for yourself at home?

---

### Read ingredient lists on food labels

- Read the list of ingredients on food labels to help you find how much sodium is in a food. The label lists the ingredients in a food in descending order (from the most to the least). If salt or sodium is high on the list, there may be a lot of sodium in the food.
- Know that sodium has different names. Sodium is also called monosodium glutamate (MSG), sodium citrate, sodium alginate, and sodium phosphate.

### Read Nutrition Facts labels

- On most foods, there is a Nutrition Facts label. This will tell you how much sodium is in one serving of food. Look at both the serving size and the sodium amount. The serving size is located at the top of the label, usually right under the "Nutrition Facts" title. The amount of sodium is given in the list under the title. It is given in milligrams (mg).
  - Check the serving size carefully. A single serving is often very small, and you may eat more than one serving. If this is the case, you will eat more sodium than listed on the label. For example, if the serving size for a canned soup is 1 cup and the sodium amount is 470 mg, if you have 2 cups you will eat 940 mg of sodium.
- The nutrition facts for fresh fruits and vegetables are not listed on the food. They may be listed somewhere in the store. These foods usually have no sodium or low sodium.
- The Nutrition Facts label also gives you the Percent Daily Value for sodium. This is how much of the recommended amount of sodium a serving contains. The daily value for sodium is 2,300 mg. So if the Percent Daily Value says 50%, this means one serving is giving you half of this, or 1,150 mg.

### Buy low-sodium foods

- Look for foods that are made with less sodium. Watch for the following words on the label.
  - "Unsalted" means there is no sodium added to the food. But there may be sodium already in the food naturally.
  - "Sodium-free" means a serving has less than 5 mg of sodium.
  - "Very low sodium" means a serving has 35 mg or less of sodium.
  - "Low-sodium" means a serving has 140 mg or less of sodium.
- "Reduced-sodium" means that there is 25% less sodium than what the food normally has. This is still usually too much sodium.
- Buy fresh vegetables, or frozen vegetables without added sauces. Buy low-sodium versions of canned vegetables, soups, and other canned goods.

-