

Low Sodium Diet

Reducing sodium to protect blood pressure and kidney function.

Sodium is the part of salt that holds fluid in the body. When kidney function declines, sodium and fluid build up — raising blood pressure, straining the heart, and causing swelling in the legs and shortness of breath.

Why This Matters

High blood pressure is both a cause and a consequence of kidney disease, and the two feed each other. Lowering sodium is one of the few things fully within your control that measurably slows kidney damage. Most people aim for less than 2,000 mg of sodium per day — roughly one teaspoon of salt from all sources combined. The surprise for most patients is that only about 10 percent of sodium comes from the salt shaker. The rest is already in the food before it reaches your kitchen.

Choose More Often	Limit or Avoid
Fresh or frozen meat, poultry, and fish (unseasoned)	Deli meat, bacon, sausage, ham, hot dogs, jerky
Fresh or frozen plain vegetables	Canned vegetables and beans (unless rinsed), pickles, olives, sauerkraut
Fresh herbs, garlic, onion, lemon, vinegar, black pepper	Table salt, sea salt, seasoned salt, soy sauce, teriyaki, fish sauce
Homemade soups and sauces	Canned soup, bouillon cubes, gravy packets, jarred pasta sauce
Plain rice, oats, unsalted pasta	Boxed rice and pasta mixes, instant noodles, stuffing mixes
Unsalted nuts, plain popcorn (portion-controlled)	Chips, pretzels, crackers, salted snack foods
Meals cooked at home	Restaurant meals, fast food, frozen dinners, most takeout

How to Read a Label in Five Seconds

- Look at milligrams of sodium, not the percentage.
- A good rule: sodium in mg should be no higher than the calories per serving.
- Check the serving size first — a can of soup is often two servings, so double what you see.
- "Reduced sodium" only means 25 percent less than the original, which is often still too much.

Eating Out Without Undoing the Week

- Ask for sauces and dressings on the side. Sauce is where the sodium hides.
- Request that your food be prepared without added salt — most kitchens will do it.
- Choose grilled or roasted over fried, breaded, marinated, or "crispy."
- Skip the bread basket and the soup course.

Your Taste Will Adjust

- Food tastes flat for about two to three weeks. Then your palate resets and old foods taste too salty.
- Do not switch to a salt substitute — those are potassium chloride and are dangerous in kidney disease.
- Build flavor with acid and aromatics: lemon, lime, vinegar, garlic, onion, fresh herbs, smoked paprika.

Questions

Every patient is different. The right targets for you depend on your kidney function, your other medical conditions, and your medications. Bring this guide to your next visit and ask us what applies to you. Call **949-642-4974** with questions between visits.