

Low Salt Diet

Your guide to a low salt diet

Review these frequently asked questions to learn more about lowering salt intake for kidney stone prevention.



“My doctor told me to limit my salt intake. What is my goal?”

Your goal should be less than 2,300-3,300 mg of sodium per day. The average stone former is eating nearly double that at 5,000 mg per day.

“I never salt my food. Why is my sodium so high?”

Not using the salt shaker is a great start, but salt is used as a preservative in all of our packaged goods and behind the deli counter. You need to start being aware of what is in your food. A good example of this is green beans. One half-cup of canned green beans has about 300 mg of sodium. The same amount of fresh or frozen green beans has 2-3 mg of sodium.

“How do I know how much salt is in something?”

Nearly all packaged goods have nutrition labels on them. You can see how much sodium is in a product by looking at the nutrition label. It is important to understand that all numbers listed on the nutrition label are PER SERVING.

To best illustrate, when you typically eat a can of soup, you eat the whole can. What you probably don't realize is that the nutrition label states that there are two servings in the can. You can see that there are nearly 2,000 mg of sodium for the entire can; that is over half of your daily allowance in that one can of soup. Read your labels. If you decide to treat yourself to that soup, you must really watch your sodium intake for the rest of the day.

“What does sodium have to do with my kidney stones?”

Your kidneys have to remove the sodium you eat from your body. When the kidneys excrete sodium, the kidneys excrete calcium too. So the more salt you eat, the more calcium you will lose in your urine. High calcium levels in your urine may increase your risk of forming new stones. If you cut back on salt, you will decrease the amount of calcium in your urine. This will help prevent new stones from forming.

“My doctor told me to lower my salt intake because I am on a medication. What does salt have to do with my medication?”

Sodium blocks the effects of the medication. Your doctor may have prescribed you a medication to support calcium retention. Some of you who have high levels of calcium in your urine will be put on a medication (called a thiazide) that helps keep calcium in the bone. If you continue to eat high amounts of sodium, the medication you are taking will be less effective.

“How can I make my food taste better without salt?”

It will be an adjustment at first. Start by experimenting with different fresh herbs and spices. You will slowly get used to eating less salt. As a matter of fact, people who cut back on their sodium notice that after a while they do not enjoy food products that have too much salt.

Facts

Keep your salt intake between 2,300-3,300 mg per day for kidney stone reduction.

- One teaspoon of salt contains approximately 2,300 mg sodium
- Increased salt = increased calcium lost in urine
- Most Americans take in more than double the recommended amount of salt
- Restaurant meals can have anywhere between 1,000-5,000 mg of sodium per meal

Tips

Dining out:

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- Select a restaurant where food is cooked to order using fresh ingredients, not pre-packaged
- Request that food be prepared without added salt
- If an entrée is served with breading, topping or sauce, you can bet there is plenty of salt in it. Remove it before eating
- Avoid table salt and high-sodium condiments and garnishes (pickles, olives, mustard, ketchup, etc)
- Use lemon or fresh oil and vinegar on top of your salads
- Request that sauces and salad dressings be served on the side
- Fresh or canned fruit may be eaten as an appetizer, salad, or dessert

Alternative seasoning ideas to enhance your food's natural flavor:

- To remove oils and salty liquids, drain canned salmon, tuna or sardines. Then add water to the can and drain again to rinse.
- Toast seeds, nuts, and whole spices to bring out their full flavor. Cook them in a dry skillet over moderate heat or on a baking sheet in a 400 degree oven.
- Roasting vegetables in a hot oven will greatly enhance their flavor.
- Pound garlic, chiles, fresh herbs and spices to release their flavors.
- Use citrus zest. The zest is the part of the peel without the white pit; it holds the true flavor of the fruit. Either grate it with a flat, sheet-type grater or remove it with a vegetable peeler and then cut the piece into thin strips.
- Grate fresh ginger with a flat, sheet-type grater.
- Use a food processor to grate fresh horseradish, which packs more punch than the salted, bottled kind.

- Use fresh herbs instead of dried when possible. Chop and add them at the last moment for a fresher taste..
- Add dried herbs such as thyme, rosemary, and marjoram for more pungent flavor, but use them sparingly.
- Sprinkle vinegar or citrus juice for wonderful flavor enhancement, but add it at the last moment. Vinegar is great on vegetables such as greens, citrus is great on fruits such as cantaloupe. Both are great on fish.
- Use dry mustard or salt-free mustard. Mix the dry mustard with water to make a very sharp condiment. You can also find bottled, salt-free mustard that's just as powerful as the kind that contains salt.
- For a little more "bite", add fresh hot peppers to your dishes. Remove the membrane and seeds before finely chopping. They are fine to eat raw, and a small amount goes a long way.
- Vegetables and fruits are easy to season without salt. Fill an herb shaker with a combination of fresh herbs and spices. Use that in place of a salt-shaker.
- Some vegetables and fruits, such as mushrooms, tomatoes, chiles, cherries, cranberries, and currants have a more intense flavor when dried than when fresh. And if they are soaked in water and reconstituted, you get a natural broth to work with.
- Buy the best and the freshest whole spices and grind them in a spice grinder. You'll taste a big difference.

Source: R.D. Starke and M. Winston, American Heart Association's Low Salt Cookbook, (New York: Times Books, 1990) 34-37.

Our hours of operation are

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