

Diet and Nutrition Guide for Heart Failure



Your diet and nutrition are very important for managing your heart failure and preventing further health problems. Because your heart is not functioning normally, your body is not able to handle extra amounts of sodium or fluid. This means that you need to pay extra attention to your diet, particularly the amount of sodium you eat and the amount of fluid you drink.

This guide is a comprehensive resource that will help you do 2 things: transition to a low sodium diet and manage your fluid intake. Understanding these changes is key to managing heart failure.

Adopting a new diet can be a big change. You will make smaller changes over time, and soon your new heart healthy diet will feel normal and manageable. Until then, keep trying and don't forget we are here to support you through this change and beyond.

Managing Sodium in Your Diet

As a part of managing your heart failure, you need to adopt a heart healthy low sodium diet. This is one of the most important self-care behaviors you can

follow to prevent hospital stays and slow the progression of your heart failure.

This section will help you learn:

- How to follow a low-sodium diet
- Your sodium goals for each day and meal
- Ways to reduce sodium in your diet
- How to read a food label
- The sodium content of certain foods and condiments
- Substitutes for high-sodium foods and condiments
- How to track your sodium intake

Why is it important for me to follow a low sodium diet?

Too much sodium in your diet can make your heart failure worse. Sodium acts like a sponge that holds fluids in your body. This extra fluid makes your heart work harder and leads to fluid buildup in your body. One of the most effective ways to reduce extra fluid is to have less sodium in your diet. Following a low-sodium diet has the following benefits:

- Your body maintains a better water (fluid) balance
- Better management of your heart failure symptoms
- Protects your heart's pumping ability
- You may experience higher energy levels and better overall well-being

What happens if I don't follow a low sodium diet?

Eating a low sodium diet is a priority for heart failure patients. Failure to manage the sodium in your diet may lead to severe symptoms, an increased need for hospital stays and a quicker progression of your disease.

Eating too much sodium may cause the following symptoms:

- Swelling in your feet, ankles, legs, and belly
- Shortness of breath during activity
- Weight gain
- Cough
- Urinating less
- Decreased appetite
- Feeling full quickly/bloated when eating
- Worsening fatigue
- Trouble breathing when lying flat (need to sit in chair or use more pillows to sleep)

Who will work with me to understand my diet?

Our Registered Dietitian Nutritionists (RDN) are food and nutrition experts who are available to discuss heart healthy food and nutrition choices with you. They provide sound, easy-to-follow nutrition advice. You have the opportunity to work closely with a dietitian and your nurses to discuss what foods to eat more of and what foods to avoid or limit.

What is the difference between sodium and salt?

We often use salt and sodium as if they mean the same thing. But they aren't quite the same. Salt is made up of two minerals: sodium and chloride.

Sodium and Salt - What's the Difference?

Here is a clear way to tell the difference between sodium and salt:



Sodium is a natural mineral found in many foods. It is also added to processed foods during manufacturing.



Salt is made up of two minerals, sodium and chloride. Salt is what we add to our food.

The problem:
sodium increases the amount of fluid in the blood vessels

Is there a health advantage to eating other forms of salt or salt alternatives?

Many forms of table salt are marketed as being “natural” or a “healthier alternative”: sea salt, rock salt, or pink Himalayan salt. Many people believe these forms of salt contain less sodium and must be better for them. **All of these salts contain comparable amounts of sodium and should be avoided.**

Garlic salt, onion salt and celery salt are also popular alternatives to table salt. Do not be fooled! Salt is salt. These products combine table, rock or sea salt with small amounts of dried garlic, onion or celery.

Use garlic powder or onion powder instead.

How much sodium can I have?

The nutrition plan for people with heart failure limits the sodium you get from food and drink to **2,000 milligrams (2 gram) per day or less**. This amount cannot be "saved" over several days. Your provider may change this limit at any time based on your specific nutritional needs.

Daily Sodium Amount

Your doctor has recommended that you limit your sodium intake to:

**2000 mg per day or less
(equal to 2 grams)**

To give you an idea of how much that is:

**1 teaspoon of salt ≈
approximately 2,300 mg
of sodium**



Follow this general guide as a starting point:

- Eat less than 2,000 milligrams (2 gram) of sodium per day.
- Eat three meals each day, limiting each meal to 600 mg or less of sodium.
- If you are only eating half of your normal meals, try eating 4-6 small meals daily.
- Eat less than 140 mg of sodium per single serving of food.
- Limit your snacking throughout the day to less than 200 mg of sodium.

How do I reduce sodium in my diet?

Follow these six general guidelines to reduce the amount of sodium in your diet:

1. Read the Nutrition Facts label

The nutrition facts label on the back of the package will tell you how much sodium is in a food product. Learning this skill will help you make healthier food choices when grocery shopping or preparing food at home.

Nutrition Facts	
8 servings per container	
Serving size	2/3 cup (55g)
Amount per serving	
Calories	230
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 8g	10%
Saturated Fat 1g	5%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 160mg	7%
Total Carbohydrate 37g	13%
Dietary Fiber 4g	14%
Total Sugars 12g	
Includes 10g Added Sugars	20%
Protein 3g	
Vitamin D 2mcg	10%
Calcium 260mg	20%
Iron 8mg	45%
Potassium 235mg	6%
<small>* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.</small>	

◆ **Step 1:**
Check the serving size and the number of servings in the package.

- The serving size tells you how much food is in one serving.
- A package often contains multiple servings. Serving sizes vary a lot.

◆ **Step 2:**
Check the amount of sodium in one serving.




- Food labels list the amount of sodium in the food in milligrams (mg).

Remember: your sodium limit is 2000 mg per day.

2. Learn the meaning of sodium label claims

Food and beverage packages may have sodium label claims that are misleading. Food manufacturers use marketing terms such as “reduced sodium” or “light in sodium” to trick you into believing their foods are healthy. **Look for “low sodium” on the food label.** This term is federally regulated. Understanding a labeling claim can help you quickly identify foods that contain less sodium.

The table below is a guide to common sodium claims and what they mean:

Choose these:		
	Sodium free	One serving contains no more than 5 mg sodium.
	Very low sodium	One serving contains no more than 35 mg sodium.
	Low sodium	One serving contains no more than 140 mg of sodium.
Check the sodium content of these:		
	Light or Lite sodium	The sodium content has been reduced by 50% as compared to its regular version.
	Reduced or Less sodium	The sodium content has been reduced by 25% as compared to the reference food. You need to look at the actual mg of sodium because it still may be high.
Avoid these:		
	High sodium	One serving contains 480 mg sodium or more; or 20% Daily Value or more.

What are some hidden sources of sodium?

Sodium is found in:

- Table salt: 1 teaspoon contains 2,300 mg of sodium
- Seasonings: onion salt, garlic salt, seasoning salt, seasoning blends
- Leavening agents: baking powder (488 mg per teaspoon) and baking soda (1,259 mg per teaspoon).
- Additives and preservatives: brine, di-sodium phosphate, monosodium glutamate, sodium erythorbate, sodium benzoate, sodium hydroxide, sodium propionate, sodium sulfite, and sodium nitrite
- Medications such as antacids, laxatives, and antibiotics. Ask your pharmacist if you have questions.

3. Add flavor without adding sodium

- Don't add salt to your food during cooking, baking or at the table.
- Try no-salt seasoning blends, herbs, or spices instead of salt.
- Avoid butter and broths with the word sodium or salt in the name or ingredient list.

4. Build a heart healthy pantry

Remove foods that are high in sodium such as canned soups, sauces, meal mixes, and boxed foods (including flavored rice, instant noodles, and ready-made pasta) from your pantry.

5. Choose low sodium versions or alternatives of your favorite foods

Prepare your own foods. Use the low-salt recipes found on page 13.

More than half of the sodium people eat comes from the high sodium foods in the table below. The next time you shop, choose low sodium alternatives from the list.

High Sodium Foods	Low Sodium Alternatives
Bacon, frankfurters, and sausages	"No Salt Added" or "Low Sodium Products"
Bread and rolls	"No Salt Added" or "Low Sodium Products"
Burgers	Season with fresh herbs and spices
Burritos and tacos	"No Salt Added" or "Low Sodium" seasoning
Canned soups	Homemade soup without added salt
Canned vegetables	Use fresh or frozen. If using canned, look for canned without salt
Cheese	Low-sodium cheeses, cream cheese, ricotta cheese, Swiss and mozzarella
Chicken nuggets and tenders	Bake fresh chicken. Add your own breading
Chips, crackers, popcorn, pretzels, and snack mixes	Unsalted crackers or chips, plain popcorn, unsalted nuts
Cold cuts and cured meats	"No Salt Added" or "Low Sodium Products"
Cookies, brownies and cakes	Portion control is helpful here. Homemade is often lower in sodium
Jarred pasta sauces, Asian sauces	Try making your own sauce at home. Look for "low sodium" products
Meat mixed dishes	Season with fresh herbs and spices
Pasta mixed dishes	Season with fresh herbs and spices
Pizza	Limit cheese. Remove meat and add more vegetables
Poultry	Select a fresh products vs frozen with "broth"

A processed food is any food that has been changed from its original, raw agricultural form. Heavily processed foods typically contain added sodium. Some examples include boxed foods, frozen meals and snack foods like chips and cookies.

6. Decrease the number of times you eat restaurant food each week

According to the Center for Disease Control, more than 70% of the sodium you eat is from processed and restaurant foods.

How do I track my sodium intake?

You need to keep track of how much sodium you eat and drink every day.

You can use the log below to track what you eat.

Extra copies of this Sodium Tracking Log can be printed from the *Michigan Medicine Care Guides from Your Clinician* site:

<https://www.med.umich.edu/1libr/CVC/Heart%20Failure/HFSodiumLog.pdf>

Meal	Food/Beverage	Sodium (mg) per Serving	Servings eaten	Total Sodium (mg)
Example	<i>1 can of Campbell's low sodium chicken noodle soup</i>	<i>120mg</i>	<i>1 serving of each</i>	<i>120+ 48 = 168mg</i>
	<i>Dannon Greek Vanilla Yogurt</i>	<i>48mg</i>		
Breakfast				
Snack				
Lunch				
Snack				
Dinner				
Snack				
Total Daily Sodium (mg):=				

There are smartphone apps to help you track too. Many of these apps have the nutritional information for a wide range of foods which makes it easier to track your sodium. Below are some examples of free apps you can use:






MyFitnessPal	Cronometer	MyNetDiary	Nutritionix	Lose It!
				



Photo credit: TasteOfHome.com

What do I need to think about when meal planning?

- It is important to eat a well-balanced diet rich in vitamins, minerals, fiber, and other essential nutrients you need.
- Eat a mix of foods across all food groups:
 - Protein foods:
 - Seafood
 - Lean meats and poultry
 - Eggs
 - Legumes (beans and peas)
 - Nuts, seeds
 - Soy products
 - Fruits and vegetables
 - Whole grains
- Break down the amount of sodium you eat by meal.
- Plan your meals ahead. Think about what you are going to eat throughout the week and shop for these items.
- Search the internet for low sodium recipes.



Below are some good websites for low sodium recipes:
American Diabetes Association:
https://diabetesfoodhub.org/recipes/low-sodium
American Heart Association Recipes:
https://recipes.heart.org/en
Davita Kidney Care:
https://www.davita.com/diet-nutrition/recipes
“Don’t Pass the Salt” Recipes for Success:
www.aahfn.org/resource/resmgr/Docs/awareness/cookbookpdf.pdf
Eat Right:
www.eatright.org/health
Heart and Stroke Canada:
https://www.heartandstroke.ca/healthy-living/recipes
Keep the Beat Recipes: Deliciously Healthy Dinners:
www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/all-publications-and-resources/keep-beat-recipes-deliciously-healthy-dinners
Million Hearts:
https://millionhearts.hhs.gov/learn-prevent/recipes.html

The Mardigian Wellness Resource Center at the Frankel Cardiovascular Center has a great selection of low-sodium cookbooks you can check out for free from the lending library. You can return the resources in person or by mail with a pre-paid envelope the Center provides. Your local public library is also a great place to find cookbooks.

What are some shopping tips for low sodium?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a list so you know what to buy before you go shopping
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shop for fresh, whole foods including fruits and vegetables, fresh meat, dried beans and nuts, and dairy products
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buy fresh, frozen or no-salt added fruits and vegetables
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read food labels carefully. Look at serving size and the sodium content per serving
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose items labeled “No Salt Added” or “Low Sodium”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid boxed items with seasoning packets, such as rice or pasta blends, as these are high in sodium
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buy fresh poultry, fish, pork, and lean meat
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid cured, salted, smoked, and other processed meat
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid “basted” or “self-basted” products which may contain injected broth with salt
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buy lunch meat labeled “No Salt Added” or “Low Sodium”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for low sodium cheese, like Swiss, Goat or Farmers cheese
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review food labels on condiments. Foods like ketchup, soy sauce, salad dressing, and seasoning packets are high in sodium
What are some cooking tips for lowering sodium?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making your own meals is a great way to eat less sodium, because you are in control of what goes into your food
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove the salt from your favorite recipes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don’t add salt to the water when cooking pasta or rice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiment with no-salt herbs, spices, and seasoning mixes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try a new low sodium recipe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When canning or freezing fruits and vegetables at home, you don't need to add salt for safety.

How can I follow a low sodium diet when eating out?

Eating out, whether it is at a restaurant, a friend's house, or a party for a special occasion, can be challenging. The following tips will help you follow a low-sodium diet when eating out:

At a restaurant:

- Visit the restaurant's website to see if they provide nutritional information for their menu items.
- You can also find restaurant nutritional information on these websites:
 - Calorieking.com
 - MyFitnessPal
- At chain restaurants, ask to see nutritional information to help you pick lower sodium meals.
- Ask for your meal to be prepared without salt.
- Ask for sauces and salad dressings to be served “on the side,” then use in small amounts.

When eating out, consider the following:

Appetizers:

- Avoid pickles, cured meats, cheeses, and salted nuts.

Main Courses:

- **Choose items that are:**
 - Grilled
 - Baked
 - Broiled
 - Roasted
- **Ask that food be prepared without:**
 - Salted butter

- Salt
- MSG
- Dressings
- **Order condiments, sauces, and dressings on the side**

At Fast Food Restaurants:

Keep takeout and fast food as an occasional treat.

At a party:

- Eat fresh fruits and raw vegetables.
- Limit the use of dips and party spreads.
- Avoid snack foods such as potato chips, salted popcorn, pretzels, or peanuts.

What if I don't cook?

If you don't cook, you have several options to help with your meals:

- **Meal Delivery Services:**
 - Meals on Wheels
<https://www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/>
 - Mom's Meals
<https://www.momsmeals.com/>
 - Magic Kitchen
<https://www.magickitchen.com>
- **Healthier Frozen Dinners:**
 - Choose frozen meals with **600 milligrams or less of sodium.**
 - Brands like **Healthy Choice and Lean Cuisine** offer lower sodium options.

Fluid Management

When you drink too much fluid, your heart has to work much harder to pump the extra fluid around your body. This can make your heart failure symptoms worsen. Limiting fluid intake is key to prevent Emergency Room visits and hospital stays.

The goal of this section is to help you learn:

- Why it's important to limit your fluid intake
- What counts as a fluid
- What your daily fluid goal should be
- How to measure and monitor your fluid intake
- Tips for adjusting to this lifestyle change

What is a fluid restriction?

A fluid restriction means you can drink a set amount of fluid each day. Your provider may recommend **limiting fluids to 8 cups (2000 ml or 2-liters) per day**. This limit may change based on your specific plan of care.

What should I count as fluid?

You should count fluid from both food and drink toward your daily fluid limit. Any food that is liquid at room temperature counts as fluid. If it melts or pours at room temperature it is a fluid.

Here are some examples of drinks and foods that count as part of your fluid total:

Any beverage you drink	
Water	Milk
Coffee	Liquid creamer

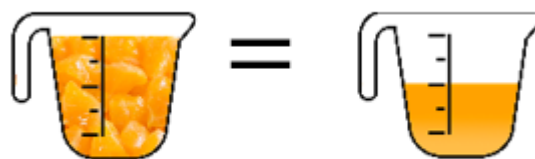
Tea	Juice
Soda pop	Fruit-flavored drinks, lemonade, punch
Sports drinks	Nutrition supplements like Ensure or Boost
Liquid medicine	Alcohol

Fluids that are part of a food	
Soup	Broth
Gravies	Sauces

Foods that melt down to a liquid (1 cup = ½ cup fluid)	
Jell-O®	Sherbet
Popsicles	Frozen yogurt
Ice cream	Ice cubes
Milkshakes/Smoothies	
Juicy fruits or vegetables (1 cup = ½ cup fluid)	
Melons (watermelon, cantaloupe, honeydew, etc.)	Cucumbers Tomatoes
Oranges, Grapes, Apples, Peaches, Berries	Applesauce

1 cup serving

½ cup fluid



How do I track my fluid intake?

Fluids can be measured in different ways. To help you measure, the chart below lists some common equivalent household amounts:

Tablespoon/Cup of fluid	Equivalent fluid ounce	Equivalent milliliters (ml)
1 tablespoon	½ fluid ounce	15ml
2 tablespoons	1 ounce	30 ml
½ cup	4 ounce	120 milliliters (ml)
1 cup	8 ounce	240 ml
4 cups	32 ounce	1000 ml (1-liter)
5 cups	40 ounce	1.2 liters
6 ¼ cups	50 ounce	1.5 liters
8 1/3 cups	67 ounce	2000 ml (2-liters)

Keeping Track of Your Fluids- Container Method

There is an easy way to track your fluid intake using a water pitcher or 2-liter pop bottle:

1. Fill the container with 2 liters (2000 ml) of water.
2. Each time you eat or drink, count the amount of fluid from your beverages and food. This includes fluid from each meal, snack, or beverage break.
3. Pour the same amount of fluid out of the container after each meal, snack, or beverage break.
4. When the container is empty, you will know you have reached your fluid limit for the day.



2 liter bottle
or pitcher

Keeping Track of Your Fluids- Written Method

Use the log below to keep track of your fluids. You can print more copies of the Fluid Tracking Log from *the Michigan Medicine Care Guides from Your Clinician* website here:

<https://www.med.umich.edu/1libr/CVC/Heart%20Failure/HFFluidLog.pdf>

Meal	Food or beverage:	Fluid (ml) per serving:	Total fluid (ml):
Example:	Coffee Cantaloupe Ice chips	1 cup of coffee= 240ml 1 cup fruit (½ cup fluid) =120ml ½ cup (1/4 cup fluid) =60ml	240+120+60= 420ml
Breakfast			
Snack			
Lunch			
Snack			
Dinner			
Snack			
Total Daily Fluid (ml) =			

What are some helpful hints for fluid control?

Plan ahead. Spread your fluid allowance evenly over the whole day to avoid drinking too much at once. Use the chart below to help plan your fluid amounts.

Menu Planner for Fluids			
For a 1.5 Liter (1500 mL) daily limit:		For a 2 Liter (2000 mL) daily limit:	
Breakfast:	1 ¼ cups fluid	Breakfast:	2 cups fluid
AM Snack:	1 cup fluid	AM Snack:	1 ¼ cups fluid
Lunch:	1 cup fluid	Lunch:	2 cups fluid
PM Snack:	1 cup fluid	PM Snack:	1 cup fluid
Dinner:	1 cup fluid	Dinner:	1 cup fluid
Night Snack:	1 cup fluid	Night Snack:	1 cup fluid

- Know how much fluid your cups, bowls, mugs, and glasses hold.
- Use small cups and glasses for beverages.
- Keep track of your fluid intake. A fluid log can help you record your fluids and add up your total each day (see previous page).

What do I need to remember about fluids and taking medications?

- Remember to save enough fluids to take with your medicine. This needs to be included in your daily fluid limit.
- Ask your pharmacist what medicine you can or need to take with food.
- Save fluids from your meals for taking pills. If your medicine instructions say to take with a full glass of water, check with your nurse or provider first.

What if I get thirsty?

It is very important to follow the fluid limit set by your provider. But it can be difficult. Try one of these tips if you feel thirsty:

- Chew sugar-free gum or suck on sugar-free hard candies or mints (sour ones work best)
- Snack on frozen fruit like grapes or strawberries (for a fun twist, roll wet grapes in sour gelatin dessert powder before freezing)
- Gargle with alcohol-free mouthwash, rinse with cold water and spit out
- Suck on a lemon slice
- Chew on fresh peeled ginger
- Apply lip balm to your lips if they are dry
- Try artificial saliva products
- Breathe through your nose and not your mouth
- Use a humidifier to moisten the air

Action steps you can take:

- Limit your fluid intake to 8 cups per day.
- Count the full volume of fluids you drink.
- Count half the volume for foods that melt.
- Count half the volume for juicy fruits and vegetables.
- Start tracking your fluid intake today!

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