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## DISORDERS

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### SALT=SODIUM

People with conditions like Meniere's Disease & Vestibular Migraine may benefit from a low-sodium diet.

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# A Guide to Following a Low-Sodium Diet

By the Vestibular Disorders Association with Mckenzie Ellis

Reducing sodium intake can play an important role in overall health and may help manage conditions such as Ménière's disease and vestibular migraine. The good news is that lowering sodium doesn't require a complete diet overhaul—small, consistent changes can make a meaningful difference.

This guide combines practical tips, label-reading strategies, and simple food substitutions to help you successfully adopt and maintain a low-sodium lifestyle.

## WHY SODIUM AWARENESS MATTERS

Most people consume far more sodium than they realize. A significant portion—about 75%—comes not from the salt shaker, but from processed and restaurant foods.

Even foods that don't taste salty can contain high levels of sodium. Common culprits include:

- Bread and baked goods
- Breakfast cereals
- Tomato sauces and condiments
- Canned vegetables and soups
- Cheese and processed meats
- Frozen meals and meat substitutes

Because sodium is often hidden, learning how to identify it—and avoid it—is key.

## HOW TO READ FOOD LABELS AND PACKAGING CLAIMS

Food packaging can be misleading. Terms like “reduced



sodium” or “lightly salted” don’t always mean a product is truly low in sodium.

Here’s what common claims actually mean:

- Sodium-free: Less than 5 mg per serving
- Very low sodium: 35 mg or less per serving
- Low sodium: 140 mg or less per serving
- Reduced sodium: At least 25% less than the original product
- Light in sodium: At least 50% less than the regular version
- No-salt-added: No salt added during processing—but may still contain sodium

Always check the Nutrition Facts label for the exact sodium content per serving.

#### **Additional label tips:**

- Choose foods with 140 mg or less per serving
- Avoid foods with more than 300 mg per serving

#### **Use % Daily Value (%DV):**

- 5% or less = low sodium
- 20% or more = high sodium

Also, watch for hidden sodium in ingredient lists. Sodium may appear under names like:

- Sodium chloride
- Sodium benzoate
- Sodium citrate
- Monosodium glutamate (MSG)

#### **SIMPLE FOOD SWAPS THAT MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE**

One of the easiest ways to reduce sodium is by making smart substitutions. Small swaps can significantly lower your daily



intake without sacrificing flavor.

Try these alternatives:

- Bottled salad dressing → Olive oil and vinegar
- Breadcrumbs → Rolled oats or no-salt crackers
- Canned beans → Dry beans or no-salt-added versions
- Canned vegetables → Fresh or no-salt-added vegetables
- Chicken broth → Sodium-free bouillon
- Flour tortillas → Corn tortillas
- Ketchup → No-salt ketchup
- Processed deli meats → Fresh chicken, turkey, or lean beef
- Pickles → Fresh cucumbers with vinegar
- Salted butter → Unsalted butter
- Soy sauce → Coconut aminos
- Table salt → Herbs, spices, or lemon juice

Even small changes—like switching tortillas or condiments—can save hundreds of milligrams of sodium per serving.





## SMART SHOPPING AND COOKING STRATEGIES

### Shop smarter:

- Follow the “No bag, no can, no jar” rule—fresh foods are usually lower in sodium
- Shop the perimeter of the grocery store, where fresh foods are located
- Compare brands—sodium levels can vary widely

### Be cautious with “healthy” labels:

Products labeled “low-fat,” “gluten-free,” or “plant-based” can still be high in sodium. Always check the label.

### Cook with flavor, not salt:

- Use herbs and spices
- Add lemon juice for a salty flavor without sodium
- Avoid relying on sauces and condiments, which are often high in sodium

## EATING OUT WITHOUT OVERDOING SODIUM

Dining out can be challenging, but it’s manageable with a few strategies:

- Order foods plain, without sauces or marinades
- Ask for meals to be prepared without added salt
- Avoid foods that are Smoked, Cured, Instant, or Processed (SCIP)
- Review menus ahead of time to plan lower-sodium options

Restaurant meals often contain high sodium because salt enhances flavor at low cost.

## WATCH OUT FOR “SALTY SURPRISES”

Some foods contain unexpectedly high sodium levels—even sweet ones.

Examples include:

- Breakfast cereals
- Milkshakes
- Baked goods
- Bread and rolls

For instance, sodium levels in cereal can vary dramatically—from 0 mg to over 500 mg per serving depending on the brand.

## THE “SALTY SEVEN” TO LIMIT

Certain foods are especially high in sodium and should be limited:

- Bread and rolls
- Cold cuts and cured meats
- Pizza
- Soup
- Chicken (especially brined or injected)
- Sandwiches
- Burritos and tacos

These foods can quickly exceed your daily sodium target.

## **BUILDING SUSTAINABLE HABITS**

### **Track your intake:**

Keeping a daily food journal helps identify hidden sodium sources and build awareness.

### **Adjust gradually:**

It can take 6-8 weeks for your taste buds to adapt to less sodium. Stick with it—foods will begin to taste more flavorful over time.

### **Get support:**

Support from family and friends can make it easier to maintain a low-sodium diet long-term.

## **FINAL THOUGHTS**

A low-sodium diet isn't about perfection—it's about making better choices more often. By understanding labels, avoiding hidden sodium, and making simple substitutions, you can significantly reduce your intake without feeling restricted. Over time, these small changes add up—helping you feel better, eat healthier, and support your overall well-being.

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