

RESTAURANT GUIDE



Cut the Sodium
but Keep the
Flavor



If you are like many other restaurant operators, you may be starting to explore strategies to reduce sodium levels in all or some of your menu items. Have you been experimenting with flavorful, low sodium ingredients? Trying out other ways to cut back on salt?

Whether you answered “yes” or “no” to the above questions, offering a menu that includes reduced sodium options is not only socially responsible, but also can help you gain loyal customers.

“Is it worth the effort?” you ask. Absolutely!



fyi Sodium—How Much Is Too Much?

The 2010 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommend reducing daily sodium intake to less than 2,300 mg. The guidelines recommend further reducing intake to 1,500 mg among persons who are 51 and older and those of any age who are African American or have hypertension, diabetes, or chronic kidney disease. The 1,500 mg recommendation applies to about half of the U.S. population, including children, and the majority of adults.

The Problem Is Not the Salt Shaker

Often, when you think of salt or sodium reduction, you automatically think of the salt shaker, but this is not the main issue. Almost 80% of the salt Americans eat is already in the foods we buy, particularly processed foods. Many of these foods might not even taste salty, such as breads, meats, and dairy products. And because restaurants often include processed ingredients in their recipes, restaurant meals may also contain high levels of sodium.



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Easy Strategies to
Cut the Sodium
but Keep the Flavor

1

Choose the Lower Sodium Product

Because so much of the sodium we eat is already in the food items we purchase, comparing nutrition information is an important first step in sodium reduction.

► **Compare brands.**

Different brands of the same foods may have different sodium levels.

► **Look for no salt added or reduced sodium products.**

Many manufacturers are working to decrease the sodium content in food items. If the product you are interested in is not available, talk to your distributor to let them know you want reduced sodium and no salt added products.

► **Ask your supplier for nutritional content or compare labels when available.**

What's the Difference?

- Half a cup of tomato sauce with added salt has 410 mg of sodium versus no salt added tomato sauce, which has just 30 mg or fresh tomato, which has just 10 mg.
- Half a cup of canned green beans with salt has 340 mg of sodium versus no salt added green beans, which have 10 mg, or fresh green beans, which have 3 mg.



10 mg sodium
(per whole tomato)

or

410 mg sodium
(per 1/2 cup)





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Cook More from Scratch

Cooking from scratch allows you to control the ingredients, including the amount of salt used. In addition to reducing sodium, this can often result in cost savings by decreasing the use of pre-made items.

Try it Yourself!

- Make marinades, salad dressings, soups, and sauces from scratch using lower sodium ingredients and less salt.
- Oven-roast meats for sandwiches rather than using processed deli meats.
- Bake your own bread and pastries, and experiment with using less salt.

What's the Difference?

Two ounces of freshly carved turkey breast contains just 39 mg of sodium versus two ounces of reduced sodium turkey breast deli meat, which contains 440 mg, and deli-style processed turkey, which contains about 515 mg.

Higher Sodium Choices

Top slice of bread
200 mg
1 teaspoon mustard
120 mg
1 leaf of lettuce
2 mg
1 slice of cheese
310 mg
6 thin slices of turkey
690 mg
Bottom slice of bread
200 mg

Total = 1,522 mg
(per whole sandwich)

Lower Sodium Choices

Top slice of bread
110 mg
1 teaspoon mustard
55 mg
1 leaf of lettuce
2 mg
1 slice of cheese
135 mg
6 thin slices of turkey
440 mg
Bottom slice of bread
110 mg

Total = 852 mg
(per whole sandwich)



fyi 10 Foods That Contribute 44% of the Sodium in the American Diet

1. Bread and rolls
2. Cold cuts and cured meats
3. Pizza
4. Poultry
5. Soups
6. Sandwiches
7. Cheese
8. Pasta mixed dishes
9. Meat mixed dishes
10. Savory snacks





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Use Less of Higher Sodium Ingredients

Identify the ingredients that are higher in sodium on your menu. Can you use less of these ingredients? This will not only reduce sodium, but might save on food costs as well.



Try Yourself!

- ▶ Use less deli meat on sandwiches.
- ▶ Decrease the amount of salad dressing added to salads.
- ▶ Use less cheese in casseroles, on pizza, and in sandwiches.
- ▶ Reduce the amount of sauce used in dishes.

Bright Idea

Fresh, Low Sodium Snacks

- ▶ Sliced melon
- ▶ Carrots and celery sticks with hummus



What About Kosher and Sea Salt?

Kosher and sea salt have all the flavor of table salt but can potentially contribute to lowering sodium in your recipes. Although these specialty salts are not actually lower in sodium, they may have larger crystals, which means that one teaspoon (tsp) of kosher or sea salt contains less sodium than table salt.

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Use More Fresh Produce

Fresh fruits and vegetables are naturally low in sodium. So, look for opportunities to include more fresh produce into your menu. Your plates will be healthier—and more colorful!



Try Yourself!

- ▶ Incorporate more vegetables into dishes such as sandwiches, omelets, and soups.
- ▶ Allow diners to choose from a list of sides that includes fruit and vegetables in addition to traditional options like French fries and chips.





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Use Less Salt

Even though the salt shaker is not the main problem, there is still opportunity to reduce the sodium content in meals by using less salt in recipes.



- ▶ Experiment with reducing the salt used in recipes by 10% to 20%, and test with your staff; they probably won't even notice!
- ▶ Taste before you salt. Does the food need it? Or is salting just a habit?
- ▶ Use salt to enhance the final flavor of your product rather than adding salt throughout the cooking process.

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Add Flavor Without Adding Salt

Reduced sodium does not have to equal bland food. There are many flavoring agents and salt free seasonings that can brighten a dish without the use of salt.



- ▶ Onions, garlic, ginger, and scallions
- ▶ Balsamic vinegar
- ▶ Citrus juice
- ▶ Salt free seasoning blends and powders
- ▶ Olive oil
- ▶ Wine



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Watch Out for Condiments and Garnishes

Garnishes are important for food presentation but can add a lot of sodium to a meal quickly. Condiments may seem like a small extra, but they can add between 100 and 900 mg per tablespoon (tbsp).



What's the Difference?

GARLIC

powder

2 mg
sodium/tsp

VS.

GARLIC

salt

960 mg
sodium/tsp



What's the Difference?



Hamburger with lettuce
and onion

575 mg sodium

or



Hamburger with mustard, mayo,
ketchup, and pickle

1,290 mg sodium



fyi Average Sodium Content of Popular Condiments and Garnishes*

- ▶ Capers = 255 mg/tbsp
- ▶ Tartar sauce = 100 mg/tbsp
- ▶ Fish sauce = 1,413 mg/tbsp
- ▶ Pickles = 306 mg (1 spear)
- ▶ Olives = 247 mg (1/4 cup)
- ▶ Ketchup = 167 mg/tbsp
- ▶ BBQ sauce = 132 mg/tbsp
- ▶ Creamy salad dressing = 105 mg/tbsp
- ▶ Oil-based salad dressing = 150 mg/tbsp
- ▶ Soy sauce = 902 mg/tbsp
- ▶ Lower sodium soy sauce = 533 mg/tbsp
- ▶ Salsa = 388 mg (1/4 cup)

*Sodium content may vary widely across brands.

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Tweak Your Cooking Techniques

Cooking techniques such as grilling, braising, roasting, searing, and sautéing bring out the natural flavors in foods and reduce the need to add salt. Use these techniques instead of frying in a breading or coating, an approach that is usually high in sodium.



Try it Yourself!

- ▶ Experiment with sodium free garnishes such as strawberries or sliced cucumber.
- ▶ Choose lower sodium versions of condiments, or just use smaller amounts.
- ▶ Offer condiments on the side, and allow customers to decide how much to use.

Success STORY

In 2011, Grilla Bites, a sustainability-focused restaurant chain in Shasta County, California, began exploring strategies for reducing the sodium content of select menu items. Through small changes that included switching to a lower sodium deli turkey, using less salt in several recipes, and reducing the serving size of some higher sodium items, Grilla Bites was able to achieve an average sodium reduction of 26% for several of its dishes in just three months.



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Adopt New Menu Strategies

Opportunities to reduce sodium can also be found in how foods are marketed and offered.

Try it Yourself!

- ▶ Offer smaller portions.
- ▶ Offer salad dressing, gravy, and sauce on the side.
- ▶ Allow for a substitution of fruits or veggies for French fries or chips.
- ▶ Offer cheese as an option, not as an automatic ingredient. One slice of cheese can add 50 to 450 mg of sodium.
- ▶ Make meal starters of bread and chips available rather than bringing them out automatically.
- ▶ Provide salt free seasonings on tables. Try including black pepper, garlic powder, red pepper flakes, and purchased or homemade no salt seasoning blends.

- ▶ Market your healthier options. Use caution with the term "low sodium," as customers may mistakenly interpret that to mean bland. Instead, use descriptive words, such as healthy, savory, fresh, or homemade.



Bright Idea

Analyze your menu and have nutrition information posted or available upon request, so customers can make informed choices.



Specific Cuisines

The following are a few sodium reduction strategies based on the type of cuisine served.

Italian/Pizza/Pasta

- ▶ Use less cheese on pizzas and pastas.
- ▶ Make pasta sauces from scratch, using no salt added or low sodium ingredients.
- ▶ Add more vegetables to your dishes.
- ▶ Use less salt when making pizza dough.
- ▶ Use lower sodium pizza sauce.
 - ▶ Use no salt added or low sodium tomato products (<140 mg/serving) to make your own sauce.
 - ▶ Season with fresh or dried herbs and spices rather than salt.
- ▶ Choose your pizza toppings with care.
 - ▶ Use lower sodium ingredients for pizza toppings, such as fresh mushrooms, fresh tomatoes, asparagus, garlic, pineapple, fresh jalapeno pepper, fresh bell peppers, spinach, onion, grilled chicken, and basil.

- ▶ Limit high sodium ingredients, including anchovies, olives, capers, pepperoni, salami, bacon, sausage, ham, canned mushrooms, or artichokes.



Try it Yourself!

Offer a "Farmer Special Pizza" using fresh vegetables purchased at a local farmers market. Try adding fresh sliced tomatoes, red onion, zucchini, summer squash, and fresh garlic to upgrade the traditional vegetarian pizza.

Bright Idea

Salt Free Italian Seasoning Blend

Add to tomato sauce for pasta dishes.

- 1 cup dried oregano
- 1 cup dried basil
- 1/2 cup onion powder
- 1/2 cup dried thyme
- 1/2 cup garlic powder
- 1/2 cup black pepper

Yield: 4 cups

Sodium content: 0 mg/serving





Asian

- ▶ Use reduced sodium soy sauce.
- ▶ Use less sauce, including soy sauce, oyster sauce, and hoisin sauce.
- ▶ Rinse thawed seafood. It may have been glazed with sodium tripolyphosphate to help protect it from freezer burn during storage.
- ▶ Marinate meats using a lower sodium recipe rather than ready-made sauces and marinades.
- ▶ Don't add salt to water when cooking rice.
- ▶ Offer non-breaded and non-fried options, including items that are grilled, braised, or steamed.
- ▶ Offer steamed veggies with no butter or salt added.
- ▶ If soy sauce is offered on tables, provide reduced sodium soy sauce.

Deli/Sandwiches

- ▶ Use lower sodium deli meat and/or roast your own meat for sandwiches.
- ▶ Compare labels on bread and wraps, and choose lower sodium options.
- ▶ Serve condiments on the side. Don't automatically add butter or mayonnaise.
- ▶ Use less cheese.
- ▶ Offer fresh fruits or veggies as side dishes with all sandwiches as a healthy alternative to chips or French fries.



- ▶ Use sliced cucumbers rather than pickles on sandwiches or as garnishes.
- ▶ Offer fresh soups made from scratch, and use a reduced sodium soup base.
- ▶ Make salad dressings from scratch.



Burgers

- ▶ Offer lettuce, tomato, onion, and avocado as toppings for hamburgers.
- ▶ Use lower sodium condiments, or just use smaller amounts.
- ▶ Offer condiments on the side.
- ▶ Don't salt fries, or salt them lightly.
- ▶ Don't salt hamburger patties while cooking.
- ▶ Offer fruit or vegetable side dishes, such as sliced apples or a small side salad, as a healthy alternative to French fries.
- ▶ Compare brands of hamburger buns and condiments, and choose the lower sodium version.

Bright Idea

Balsamic Vinaigrette

5 cups balsamic vinegar
 1/4 cup garlic, minced
 1/4 cup fresh thyme
 1 cup dark brown sugar
 9 1/2 cups extra-virgin olive oil

Yield: 1 gallon

Sodium content: 3 mg/serving

American

- ▶ Use salt free butter or margarine.
- ▶ Purchase lower sodium canned products.
- ▶ Use less cheese in recipes (e.g., in omelets, cheeseburgers, etc.).
- ▶ Offer fruit or vegetable side dishes as a healthy alternative to French fries or chips.
- ▶ Offer grilled or broiled seafood and chicken dishes marinated in low sodium marinade.
- ▶ Incorporate more vegetables into dishes such as sandwiches, omelets, and soups.
- ▶ Make homemade soups using a low sodium soup base.
- ▶ Offer oatmeal topped with fresh fruit for a low sodium breakfast choice.
- ▶ Offer breakfast sides of fruit or sliced tomatoes as a healthy alternative to bacon and sausage.
- ▶ Offer entrée salads made with grilled chicken and fish with low sodium salad dressing served on the side.



Mexican

- ▶ Use less cheese in quesadillas, enchiladas, etc.
- ▶ Include more vegetables in burritos and tacos.
- ▶ Use reduced sodium canned beans or dried beans with little or no added salt.
- ▶ Compare the sodium in different brands of tortillas and choose the lowest sodium product.
- ▶ Make homemade salsas using little or no salt.
- ▶ Use fresh or no salt added or low sodium tomatoes, beans, and canned vegetable products.
- ▶ Use reduced sodium taco seasoning.
- ▶ Offer burrito bowls that don't include tortillas.
- ▶ Offer lower sodium salad dressings.

Bright Idea

Salt Free Taco Seasoning Blend

- 1 1/2 cups dried minced onion
- 1 1/4 cups chili powder
- 1/3 cup cornstarch
- 1/3 cup garlic powder
- 1/3 cup ground cumin
- 1/4 cup dried oregano
- 2 tsp cayenne pepper

Yield: 4 cups

Sodium content:
20 mg/serving

Steakhouse

- ▶ Use salt free dry rubs for meats.
- ▶ Use unsalted butter for steak or side dishes, or avoid butter altogether to save on fat and calories.
- ▶ Make your own low sodium marinades, salad dressings, and BBQ sauces.
- ▶ Use smaller amounts of condiments and/or offer them on the side.
- ▶ Offer baked potatoes, sweet potatoes, salads, or veggies in place of French fries.
- ▶ Offer bread only upon request.
- ▶ Offer smaller portions as an option.



Seafood

- ▶ Use fresh or dried herbs for seasoning rather than salt.
- ▶ Offer more unbreaded items, as breading can be a high source of sodium.
- ▶ Offer steamed vegetables without added butter and salt.
- ▶ Reduce added salt in recipes.
- ▶ Don't salt French fries, or salt them lightly.
- ▶ Purchase lower sodium canned goods.
- ▶ Rinse thawed seafood. It may have been glazed with sodium tripolyphosphate to help protect it from freezer burn during storage.
- ▶ Offer salads, veggies, baked potatoes, or sweet potatoes in place of French fries.

Bright Idea

Sesame Vinaigrette Salad Dressing

- 1 cup sesame seeds
- 1 cup reduced sodium soy sauce
- 2 cups unseasoned rice wine vinegar
- 1 cup ginger, minced
- 5 cups unsweetened apple sauce
- 1 cup toasted sesame oil
- 5 cups canola oil

Yield: 1 gallon

Sodium content:
135 mg/serving

Making Sodium Reduction Work for You

Congratulations! You are officially stocked up on successful strategies to reduce sodium in your restaurant! Now it's time to think about how you can put them into action. Take a moment to jot down some ideas. If you've got thoughts on recipes to tweak, ingredients to swap out, or other techniques to try, write them here for handy reference!



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For more information:

www.healthyshasta.org

www.cdc.gov/salt



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