

Eating Away from Home: Tips for making healthy choices

What about sodium?

Q. I am following a sodium/salt restricted diet. What are some things to consider when I am eating away from home?

According to the 2004 Canadian Community Health Survey, most Canadians of all ages consume far more sodium (salt) than is necessary or recommended.

This and other studies also point out that it is not a matter of Canadians over using the salt shaker but more a matter of the types of processed, prepared foods that we tend to consume.

How much sodium?

Dietary Reference Intakes (DRI) provide the recommended average daily intake and tolerable upper intake levels for sodium for several age/sex groups. It is recommended that adults have no more than 2300 mg of sodium per day. For a variety of medical reasons, a physician or medical specialist may prescribe a specific daily sodium restriction. Generally sodium is measured and referenced in milligrams.

In general, prepared convenience foods eaten away from home (at the vending machine, canteen, corner store or restaurant) have a higher sodium content than foods prepared at home.

Consider these healthy eating tips for choosing foods lower in sodium (salt) when eating away from home:

- Check the Nutrition Facts Table on food packages for the % Daily Value of sodium per serving when possible i.e.: at the corner store, canteen or grocery store. This will tell you if you will be getting a little or a lot of sodium by eating the stated serving size.
- Ask for items to be prepared without added salt and sauces (often a source of sodium) on the side.
- Ask for nutrition information for menu items at restaurants and take out. Choose items with lower sodium content. (Many restaurants have websites that give this information. It can help you choose your restaurant.)
- Plan ahead and bring food from home if possible (e.g. a sandwich on whole grain bread, cut up vegetables and fresh fruit).

Choose <i>more</i> often	Choose <i>less</i> often
Fresh, frozen vegetables or fruit	Canned and pickled vegetables, olives
Most canned fruit	Vegetable juices
Whole grain breads and cereal	Some dried fruits
Plain rice, pasta and potatoes	Most soups
Cooked plain meats and fish such as roast beef or chicken	Commercially prepared potatoes, pasta dishes, instant hot cereals
Milk alternatives	Processed, cured or smoked meat, hot dogs, sausages, pepperoni, ham
Plain, unflavoured milk	Snack foods (chips, pretzels)
	Commercial puddings
	Sports drinks

*****Remember, your sodium intake accumulates from all of the foods you eat in a day.***

Comparison of sodium in foods

Nutrition Information	Cucumber, raw	Pickle, dill (includes Kosher & Polish)
Serving size	125 mL (1/2 cup) slices	125 mL (1/2 cup) slices
Calories (kcal)	9	15
Total fat (g)	0	0
Saturated (g)	0	0
Trans (g)	N/A	N/A
Sodium (mg)	1.0	1050
Carbohydrate (g)	2	3
Fibre (g)	1	1
Protein (g)	0	1

Nutrition Information	Turkey breast, meat and skin, roasted	Pastrami, beef, 98% fat-free
Serving size	75 g	75 g
Calories (kcal)	94	71
Total fat (g)	3	1
Saturated (g)	1	0
Trans (g)	N/A	N/A
Sodium (mg)	298	758
Carbohydrate (g)	0	1
Fibre (g)	0	0
Protein (g)	17	15

Reference: Canadian Nutrient File, accessed November 23, 2007
Please note values have been rounded to the nearest whole number.
N/A – not available