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Digestive Health Center

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Low-Sodium Diet/Liver Cirrhosis

If you have cirrhosis of the liver that is causing ascites, then your doctor may recommend a low-sodium diet. It is often recommended to limit sodium to 2,000 mg a day. Ascites is an accumulation of fluid in the abdominal area. Lowering the sodium you eat will lessen your body's tendency to retain fluid. Think of sodium as like a sponge, causing your body to hold onto fluid. Read labels for the mg of sodium. Generally, look for entrée-type foods to be less than 500 mg, and side dish items to be less than 140 mg, of sodium per serving.

WHAT TO EAT WHEN LIMITING SODIUM:

- Homemade, fresh meals instead of restaurant meals.
- Fresh meats without a brine or sodium solution added.
- Fresh, plain, frozen or well-drained canned vegetables.
- Fruit.
- Fresh, cooked and plain potatoes, pasta and rice.
- Reduced-sodium processed foods, such as reduced-sodium soup, tuna and tomato sauce.
- Pepper, garlic powder, onion powder or herb mix seasonings with your meals. Ask your doctor before you use a salt substitute.

BELOW ARE TIPS TO LOWERING SODIUM:

1. Avoid processed foods as much as possible. Examples of processed foods are:
 - Canned foods, such as canned meats, soups, meals (beef stew) and canned pasta meals.
 - Frozen meals, entrees and pizza.
 - Boxed package meals and side dishes, such as boxed pasta, rice and potato mixes and meal helpers.
 - Processed and deli meats, such as hot dogs, brats, frozen breaded chicken and fish patties, sausage, bacon and luncheon meat.
 - Cheese — especially processed cheese food, cheese slices and cottage cheese.
2. Limit eating out in restaurants
 - Fast food meals can easily have 1,000 mg of sodium.
 - Limit meals with sauces, gravies, processed meats and cheese.
 - Limit casserole/mixture-type items, such as pasta dishes or stir-fry dishes with sauce.
 - Choose the plainest food items possible, such as plain hamburger, plain grilled chicken with fresh vegetable toppings, plain meat with baked potato and unsalted vegetables.

3. Limit condiments. Examples include ketchup, barbecue sauce, soy sauce and salad dressing.
4. Limit pickled or brine-based foods. Examples include pickles, sauerkraut and pickled foods.
5. Limit some bread products that are high-sodium. Examples include biscuits, pancakes, waffles and flour tortillas.
6. Don't add table salt to foods.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Talk to your doctor about a referral to see a registered dietitian to review your diet and advise on effective ways for you to reduce sodium.

Choose My Plate

This website (www.choosemyplate.gov) contains many tips on eating healthy. You can create a profile and record what you eat and the website will add up the amount of sodium you consume.

American Heart Association

In your Google search box, you can search "American Heart Association Salt and Sodium". Websites from the American Heart Association (www.heart.org) will be available, including recipes, tips on reducing sodium and how to read food labels.

FDA

In your Google search box, type "FDA and sodium" to get information from the FDA that includes reading the nutrition facts on food labels.