

# Chow Line

News from the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences

## Be sodium smart with soup, processed foods

**Does any canned soup contain just a small amount of sodium? Even the types marked as “healthy” seem to have quite a bit. Do I have to resort to making homemade soup?**

You're right — soups, like many other processed foods — can contain a frightful amount of sodium.

How much is too much? The recommendation is to limit sodium to less than 2,300 milligrams a day, or to just 1,500 milligrams if you're 51 years or older, African-American, or if you have high blood pressure, diabetes or chronic kidney disease. Americans in those categories account for about half of the U.S. population.

Unfortunately, the average sodium intake for Americans is more than 3,400 milligrams a day. Too much sodium contributes to high blood pressure, heart attack and stroke. Scientists estimate that reducing average sodium consumption by 400 milligrams a day could reduce deaths in the U.S. by 28,000 a year.

It sounds like you're already reading labels: That is key. Besides looking at Nutrition Facts to find out how many milligrams of sodium there are per serving, also look for these terms and know what they mean:

- **Salt/Sodium-Free:** Fewer than 5 milligrams of sodium per serving.
- **Very Low Sodium:** 35 milligrams of sodium or less per serving.
- **Low Sodium:** 140 milligrams of sodium or less per serving.
- **Reduced Sodium:** At least 25 percent less sodium than in the original product. Note that these products often contain more than 140 milligrams of sodium per serving.



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- **Light in Sodium or Lightly Salted:** At least 50 percent less sodium than the regular product.
- **No-Salt-Added or Unsalted:** No salt is added during processing, but these foods are not necessarily sodium-free. Check the Nutrition Facts Label to be sure.

One reason so much salt is added to processed foods is — you guessed it — flavor. Food manufacturers who try to drastically reduce sodium often find that those products don't sell.

So, what can you do? Here are a few ideas:

- Try looking in the organic or health food aisles for canned soup. Those products aren't always low in sodium, but sometimes they are.
- Do a web search for “no salt added soup” or “low sodium soup.” You might find brands to buy online that aren't available at your local store.
- Water down a favorite soup or broth enough so it reduces the sodium to an acceptable level. You can add back flavor and substance with garlic or other herbs and spices, including salt-free spice blends; fresh or frozen vegetables, such as chopped carrots, peppers and tomatoes; extra noodles or cooked chopped meat or poultry; or even a splash of wine or balsamic vinegar.

If you're ready to try making soup from homemade stock, the American Heart Association offers ideas for boosting flavor. See them at [bit.ly/AHASoup](http://bit.ly/AHASoup).

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**Editor:** This column was reviewed by Irene Hatsu, Ohio State University Extension's food security specialist.

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