

# Change your salty ways in only 21 days

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Sodium – the everyday meal offender that might make your face feel puffy and your jeans look, and feel, tighter. Did you know that by reducing your sodium intake during a three week period you can change your sodium palate and start enjoying foods with less sodium? On Jan. 7, step up to the plate, re-charge your taste buds and give your heart-health a boost with the new Sodium Swap Challenge from the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association.

The average American consumes about 3,400 milligrams of [sodium](#) a day – more than twice the 1,500 milligrams recommended by the [American Heart Association](#)/American Stroke Association. Changing your salty ways may be difficult, especially since you have acquired a taste for salt, but don't worry – making the swap or taking the challenge doesn't have to be hard. With the help of the Salty Six (common foods that may be loaded with excess sodium that can increase your risk of [heart disease](#)), you'll be able to identify, and keep track of, top food culprits.

"To get started with the association's challenge, we ask that consumers get familiar with the [food labels](#) and nutrition facts for the foods they eat and track their sodium consumption over the first two days to get an idea of how much they are eating, which I'm sure will be surprising to many people." commented Rachel Johnson, Ph.D., RD, FADA, spokesperson for the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association, Robert L. Bickford, Jr. Green and Gold Professor of Nutrition and Professor of Medicine at the University of Vermont. "Then, over the course of the next three weeks, consumers will use the Salty Six as their

guide to help lower their [sodium intake](#)."

Here's an outline of how you can kick-off your own Sodium Swap Challenge:

- Week 1 – Start by tackling your consumption of breads and rolls as well as cold cuts and cured meats. For example, one piece of bread can have as much as 230 milligrams of sodium while a serving of turkey cold cuts could contain as much as 1,050 milligrams of sodium. When your recommended daily intake is kept to 1,500 milligrams or less, it's amazing how fast it all adds up. Check your labels on these items, look for lower sodium items and track your sodium consumption each day and log how much you've shaved out of your diet. Portion control does make a difference. Foods eaten several times a day add up to a lot of sodium, even though each serving is not high.
- Week 2 – Keep that momentum going! This week's foods include pizza and poultry. If you're going to eat pizza, try to aim for one with less cheese and meats or lower sodium versions of these items or try something different and add veggies instead. When cooking for your family this week use fresh, skinless poultry that is not enhanced with sodium solution rather than fried or processed. Keep your eyes on the 1,500 milligrams of sodium each day and, again, log your results.
- Week 3 – As you round out your challenge and embark on the last week of your challenge, your focus includes soups and sandwiches. The two together typically make a tasty lunch or dinner duo, but one cup of chicken noodle or tomato soup may have up to 940 milligrams – it varies by brand —and, after you add all of your meats, cheeses and condiments to your sandwich, you can easily surpass 1,500 milligrams in one day. This week, when choosing a soup, check the label and try lower sodium varieties of your favorites and make your sandwiches with lower sodium meats and cheeses and try to eliminate piling on your condiments. Be

sure to track your sodium and try to keep your daily consumption to less than 1,500 milligrams.

By the end of the challenge you should start to notice a change in the way your food tastes and how you feel after you eat. You might even start to lean towards lower sodium options and will be aware of how much sodium you are consuming in a day – keeping that sight on the goal of only having no more than 1,500 milligrams in a day and controlling the portion sizes of your meals.

As you start jotting down your grocery list, or planning your next meal out, be sure to keep the Salty Six in mind and look for the Heart-Check mark on products in your local grocery store and menu items in restaurants. Products that are certified by the Heart-Check Food Certification Program meet nutritional criteria for heart-healthy foods and can help keep you on track during your challenge.  
([www.heartcheckmark.org](http://www.heartcheckmark.org) )

Making an effort to reduce the sodium in your diet will help you feel better and will help you live a heart-healthier life. Take time to educate yourself and learn more from others. Explore links to tasty recipes, get shopping tips, access tools and resources and share your personal Sodium Swap successes on our Facebook page:

[www.facebook.com/americanheart](https://www.facebook.com/americanheart) and click the Sodium Swap tab. For further sodium tips, resources and encouragement during your own Sodium Swap Challenge visit [www.heart.org/sodium](http://www.heart.org/sodium) .

Provided by American Heart Association

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