

Heart Health: Sodium & Added Sugar

Supports: Building Block 13 — Heart Health: Sodium & Sugar

Why It Matters

Two things that quietly add up in a lot of everyday foods are sodium and added sugar. Neither is something to fear, and you do not have to give up the foods you love. But knowing where they tend to hide, and getting a feel for how they affect your energy and how you feel, puts you in the driver's seat. When you can spot them, you get to decide how much fits your day. A little awareness goes a long way toward caring for your heart.

What to Know

Where it hides

Added sugar goes by many names on an ingredient list, including anything ending in -ose, along with corn sweetener, brown rice syrup, and barley malt. Sodium often shows up in places you would not expect, like breads, sauces, dressings, and packaged foods, rather than just the salt shaker. Much of both comes from processed and restaurant foods rather than from cooking at home.

- Sugary drinks like sodas, sweetened coffees, and sports drinks are a common source of added sugar.
- Sauces, dressings, canned goods, and packaged snacks can carry more sodium than you would guess.
- Products labeled fat-free or low-fat sometimes add sugar to make up for flavor.

Read the label

The Nutrition Facts label and ingredient list are your best tools. General heart-healthy guidance, like that from the American Heart Association, suggests keeping added sugars limited and sodium moderate, rather than aiming for any single magic number. You do not need to memorize figures; you just need to compare and choose in a way that works for you.

- Check where sugar falls in the ingredient list; near the top means there is more of it.
- Scan the sodium line and compare similar products to find a lighter option.
- Add flavor yourself with herbs, spices, citrus, cinnamon, or vanilla instead of relying on salt or sugar.
- Ask for sauces and dressings on the side when eating out so you control the amount.

★ **Bryce's staples for this block.** Sweeteners — maple syrup, honey, and brown sugar, used in small amounts to finish oatmeal, yogurt, dressings, and baking rather than as the main event. The full list is in the “Bryce's Kitchen Staples” handout.

Being active supports your heart too. Movement is a powerful partner to what is on your plate. General guidance points to about 150 minutes of moderate activity a week, plus strength work twice a week, and you can build up gradually. Check with your physician before starting or increasing activity.

None of this is about guilt or cutting out the foods you enjoy. Whole foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and beans naturally crowd in more fiber and flavor, and when a sweet craving hits, whole fruit like berries is a satisfying option.

Try This

Take an honest, no-judgment look at how sugar shows up in your daily routine. The goal is simply awareness, so you can decide what, if anything, you would like to adjust.

? How often do sugary drinks or sweet foods show up in a typical day for you?

? When you check a label, where does sugar or sodium tend to land, and did anything surprise you?

? What is one small swap or label habit you would like to try this week?
