

# Cooking Light

JAN/FEB 2011

## CHICKEN MAKEOVER!

25 QUICK & EASY  
WEEKNIGHT  
INSPIRATIONS  
P.132

## CITRUS POWER

LIGHT & BRIGHT  
SALADS, ENTRÉES,  
& DESSERTS P.122

## SUPERFAST ITALIAN

P.30



NUTRITION MADE EASY  
BREAKFAST  
PORTION SECRETS P.50

2011

A SIMPLE  
PLAN FOR  
EATING  
HEALTHY  
ALL YEAR

P.56

Lemony  
Chicken  
Saltimbocca  
P.30

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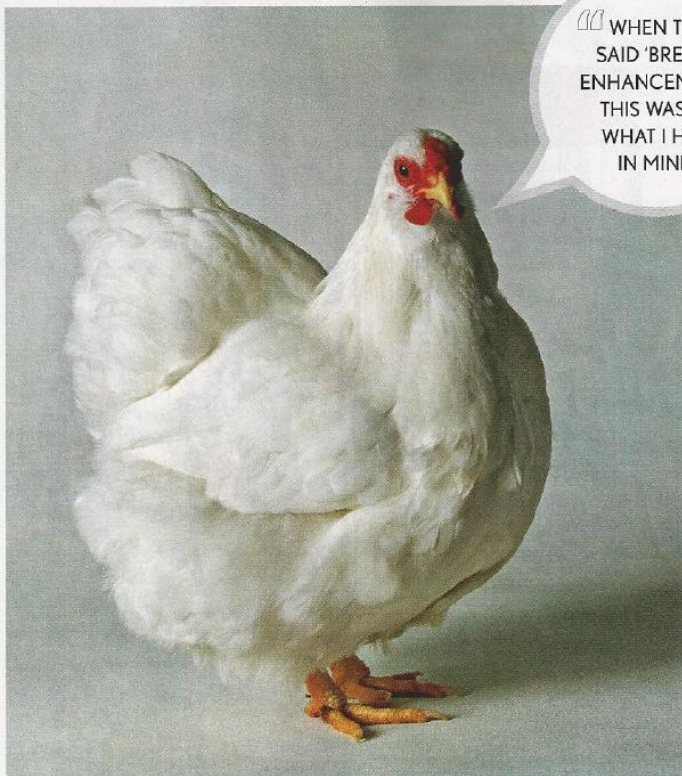




# Poultry's Salty Little Secret

One chicken breast could eat up 20% of your sodium limit—before you even start to cook.

BY JANET HELM, MS, RD



“AS AMERICAN AS BONELESS, skinless chicken breast” doesn’t have quite the same ring to it as “American as apple pie,” but it’s far more appropriate: We eat an average of 87 pounds of chicken per year, up 81% from 48 pounds in 1980. This makes the plumping practice in poultry processing even more troubling.

About one-third of the fresh chicken found in supermarket meat cases has been synthetically saturated with a mix of water, salt, and other additives via needle injections and high-pressure vacuum tumbling. The process is designed to make naturally lean poultry meat juicier and more tender. A 4-ounce serving of what the industry calls “enhanced” poultry can contain as much as 440mg sodium. That’s nearly one-fifth of the current 2,300mg daily sodium allotment—from a source you’d never suspect.



## Ask Our Dietitian

**Q:** Do fresh grapes provide the same phytonutrient concentration as red wine?

—T. Hardaway, via e-mail

**A:** Grapes, grape juice, and red wine are all excellent sources of antioxidants and other phytonutrients, but the concentrations can vary widely depending on the type of grape. Snack-

ing grapes are usually big, seedless, and thin-skinned, while wine-making grapes are smaller, contain seeds, and have thicker skins.

When crushed, seeds and skins contribute higher concentrations of flavonoids to wine, particularly heart-healthy resveratrol. A cup of red grapes can contain anywhere from

0.24 to 1.25mg resveratrol; a 5-ounce pour of wine has 0.29 to 1.89mg. But snacking grapes have other benefits, too—a cup of seedless grapes gives you 1.4g fiber. The best approach with any nutrient is to get it from a variety of sources. So sip (moderately) or snack and enjoy grapes in all their forms.

**Q:** I don't usually eat until after 8 p.m. Am I more likely to gain weight by eating late?

—Audrey S., via e-mail

**A:** As long as you aren't depriving yourself during the day, causing you to overload before bed, eating late shouldn't be a problem. It's true that spreading your calories

across the day gives your body more time to burn off and digest the food, but if eating late is your best chance at getting a wholesome, healthful dinner, then stick with it. Just keep your eye on a number other than the time: the total calories you consume each day.

—Sidney Fry, MS, RD



## NUTRITION MADE EASY

Hot Topic



### THE FINE PRINT ON PLUMPED POULTRY

#### NATURAL, NONENHANCED POULTRY (per 4 ounces raw)

Sodium: 45 to 70mg

**Fine print says:** "Contains 1 to 5% retained water." (This is water that may be absorbed during the chilling process; it's not injected, and no salt is added.)

#### ENHANCED POULTRY (per 4 ounces raw)

Sodium: 330 to 440mg

**Fine print says:** "Enhanced with up to 15% chicken broth, salt, and carrageenan."

Worse, it's 500% more sodium than is found naturally in untreated chicken. Yet the word "natural" can be used on the labels of these injected birds. USDA labeling policies give poultry companies a green light to label their enhanced products "100% natural" or "all natural," even though they've been injected with ingredients in concentrations that do not naturally occur in a chicken. (Like many foods, chicken contains trace amounts of sodium and other minerals.)

With injections totaling 15% or more of the meat's weight, a 7-pound enhanced chicken might net only 6 pounds of meat. Do the math: At \$2.99 per pound, you've paid a premium of up to \$0.45 per pound for added salt and water. Each year, this costs Americans about \$2 billion,

according to the Truthful Labeling Coalition, a trade group started by poultry producers who want to put an end to misleading labels on enhanced products.

At a time when sodium consumption has risen to the top of public health issues—and when at press time we expected to hear soon about a government move to lower sodium recommendations—here's an example of salt being needlessly added to fresh, whole foods.

Processors are required to disclose the injections, but the lettering on the packaging can be small and inconspicuous. To know if you're picking up an enhanced product, squint at the fine print, which will list something like, "contains up to 15% chicken broth." You can also check the ingredient list, and, of course, look for the sodium content on the Nutrition Facts label. If the chicken is truly natural, the sodium content won't stray higher than 70mg per serving.

What you do with your chicken or turkey once you get it home is another story. However, at that point you are consciously choosing to add sodium, and you can control the amount you use. Seasoning a chicken breast with  $\frac{1}{8}$  teaspoon salt will add 250mg sodium—a healthier choice that you'll be much happier making if that same chicken breast doesn't come preloaded with 440mg of the salty stuff.

### NEED NUTRITION HELP?

Send your questions to [nutritioneditor@CookingLight.com](mailto:nutritioneditor@CookingLight.com) or to *Cooking Light*, P.O. Box 1748, Birmingham, AL 35209. Readers are cautioned that the advice here is not meant to substitute for a regular, professional health-care consultation.

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