



Excel drop down list

Excel drop down list, aka dropdown box or dropdown menu, is used to enter data in a spreadsheet from a predefined items list. When you select a cell containing the list, a small arrow appears next to the cell, so you click on it to make a selection.

The main purpose of using drop down lists in Excel is to limit the number of choices available for the user. Apart from that, a dropdown prevents spelling mistakes and makes data input faster and more consistent.

	A	B	C	D	E
1	Excel drop down list				
2	Question	Answer			
3	Do you often visit your parents?	Yes			
4					
5	Do you read a lot?	Not sure			
6					
7	Do you have a hobby?	No			
8					
9	Do you have a pet?	Yes			
10					
11	Do you travel a lot?	No			
12					
13	Do you earn enough for a decent standard of living?	Yes			
14					
15	Can eating fatty food cause problems?	Yes			
16		Yes			
17	Do you enjoy using Excel?	No			
18		Not sure			
19					

How to create drop down list in Excel

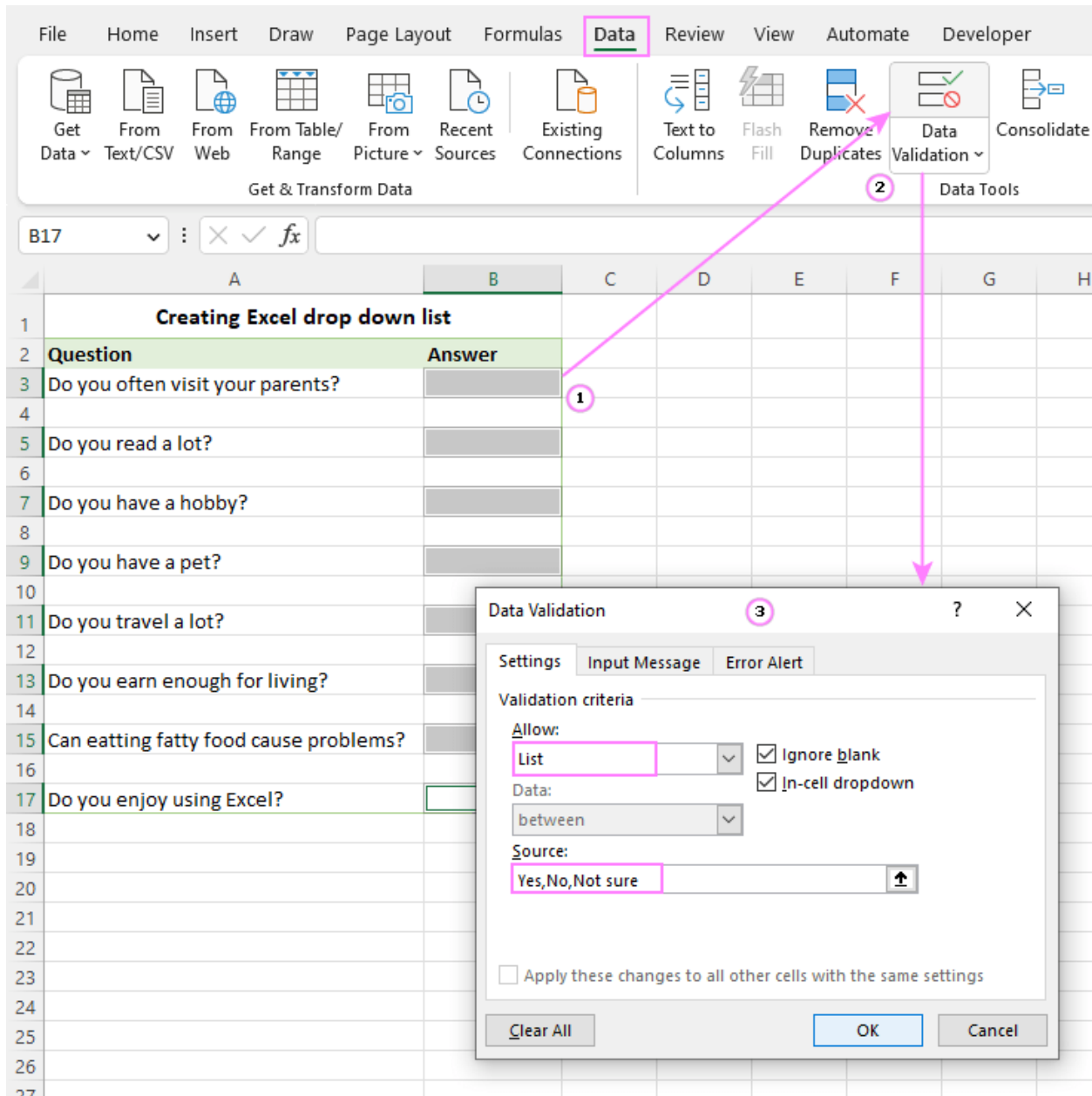
To make a drop-down list in Excel, use the [Data Validation](#) feature. Here are the steps:



1. Select one or more cells where you want the picklist to appear. This can be a single cell, a range of cells, or a whole column. To select multiple non-contiguous cells, press and hold the **Ctrl** key.
2. On the *Data* tab, in the *Data Tools* group, click *Data Validation*.
3. On the *Settings* tab of the *Data Validation* dialog box, do the following:
 - In the *Allow* box, select **List**.
 - In the *Source* box, type the items separated by a comma with or without spaces. Or select a range of cells on the sheet containing the items.
 - Make sure the *In-cell dropdown box* is checked (default), otherwise the drop-down arrow won't appear next to the cell.
 - Select or clear the *Ignore blank* option depending on how you want to handle empty cells.
 - When done, click OK.

Congratulations! You have successfully created a simple dropdown list in Excel. Now, your users can click an arrow next to a cell, and then select the entry they

want.



Question	Answer
Do you often visit your parents?	
Do you read a lot?	
Do you have a hobby?	
Do you have a pet?	
Do you travel a lot?	
Do you earn enough for living?	
Can eating fatty food cause problems?	
Do you enjoy using Excel?	

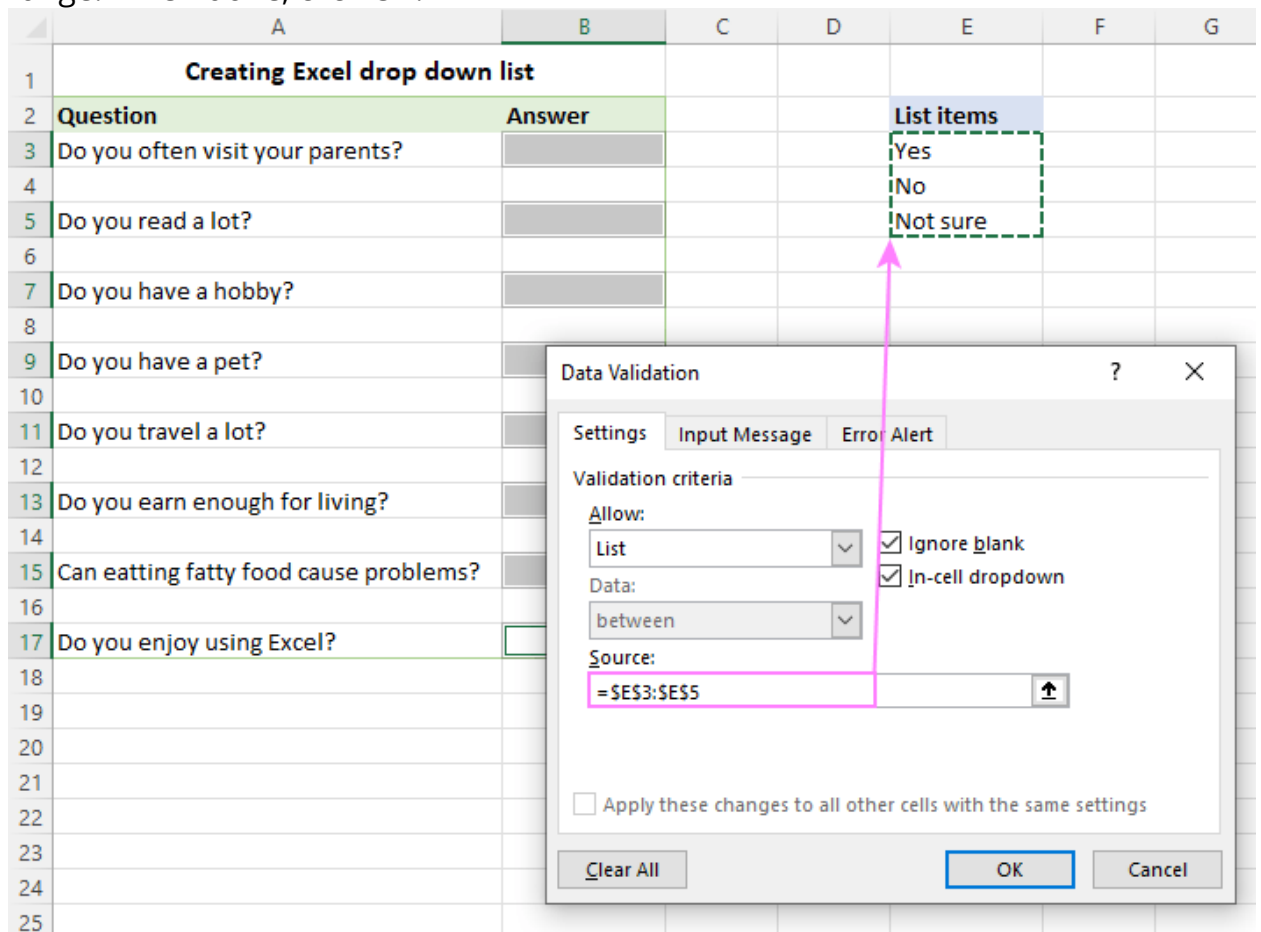
A **drop down list of comma separated values** works well for small data validation lists that are unlikely to ever change. For frequently updated lists, you'd better use a **range** or **table** for the source. The detailed step-by-step instructions for each method follow below.

Tip. To expedite data input in your Excel sheets, you can also use a [data entry form](#).

Make drop-down menu from a range of cells

To insert a drop-down list based on the values input in a range of cells, carry out these steps:

1. Start by creating a list of items that you want to include in the drop-down. For this, just type each item in a separate cell. This can be done in the same worksheet as the dropdown list or in a different sheet.
2. Select the cell(s) that are to contain the list.
3. On the ribbon, click the *Data* tab > *Data Validation*.
4. In the *Data Validation dialog window*, select *List* from the *Allow* drop-down menu. Place the cursor in the *Source box* and select the range of cells containing the items, or click the *Collapse Dialog* icon and then select the range. When done, click OK.



	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	Creating Excel drop down list						
2	Question	Answer			List items		
3	Do you often visit your parents?				Yes		
4					No		
5	Do you read a lot?				Not sure		
6							
7	Do you have a hobby?						
8							
9	Do you have a pet?						
10							
11	Do you travel a lot?						
12							
13	Do you earn enough for living?						
14							
15	Can eating fatty food cause problems?						
16							
17	Do you enjoy using Excel?						
18							
19							
20							
21							
22							
23							
24							
25							

Data Validation

Settings | Input Message | Error Alert

Validation criteria

Allow: List

Data: between

Source: =E\$3:E\$5

Ignore blank

In-cell dropdown

Apply these changes to all other cells with the same settings

Clear All | OK | Cancel



Advantages: You can modify your dropdown list by making changes in the referenced range without having to edit the data validation list itself.

Drawbacks: To add or remove items, you will need to update the *Source* range reference.

Insert drop down list from a named range

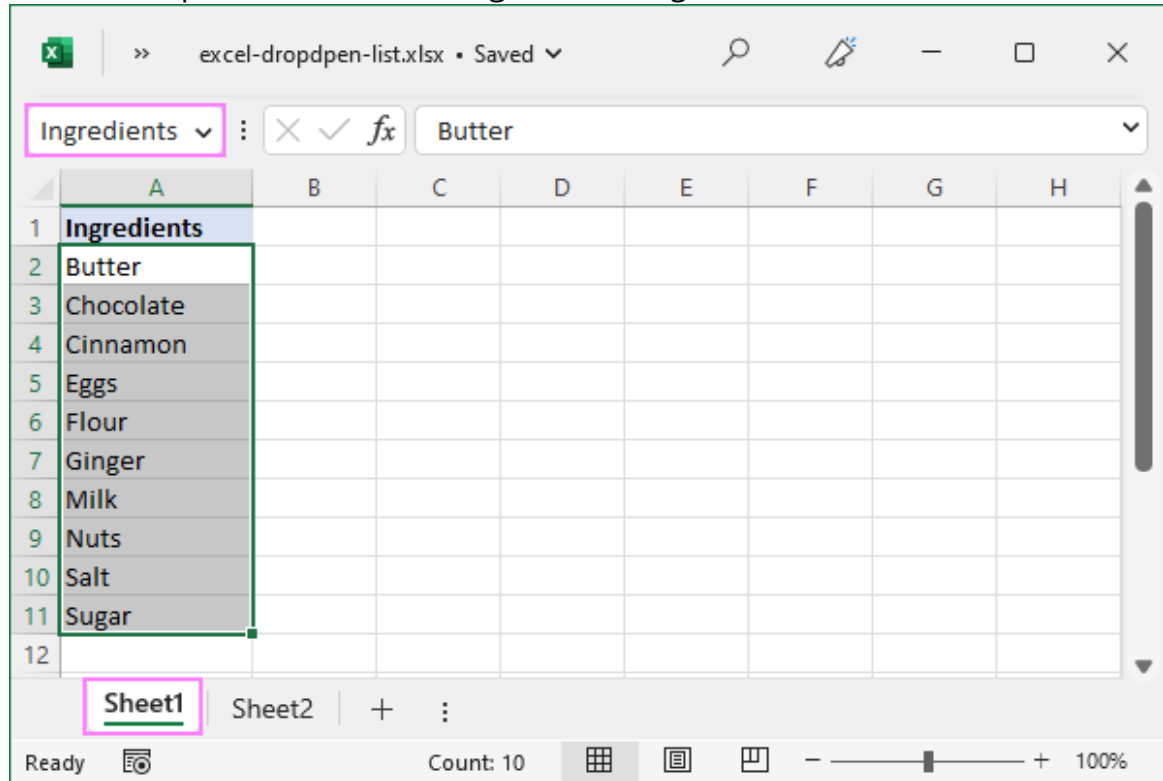
Initially, this method of creating an Excel data validation list takes a bit more time but may save even more time in the long run.

1. Make a list of items on the sheet. The values should be entered into a single column or row without any blank cells.

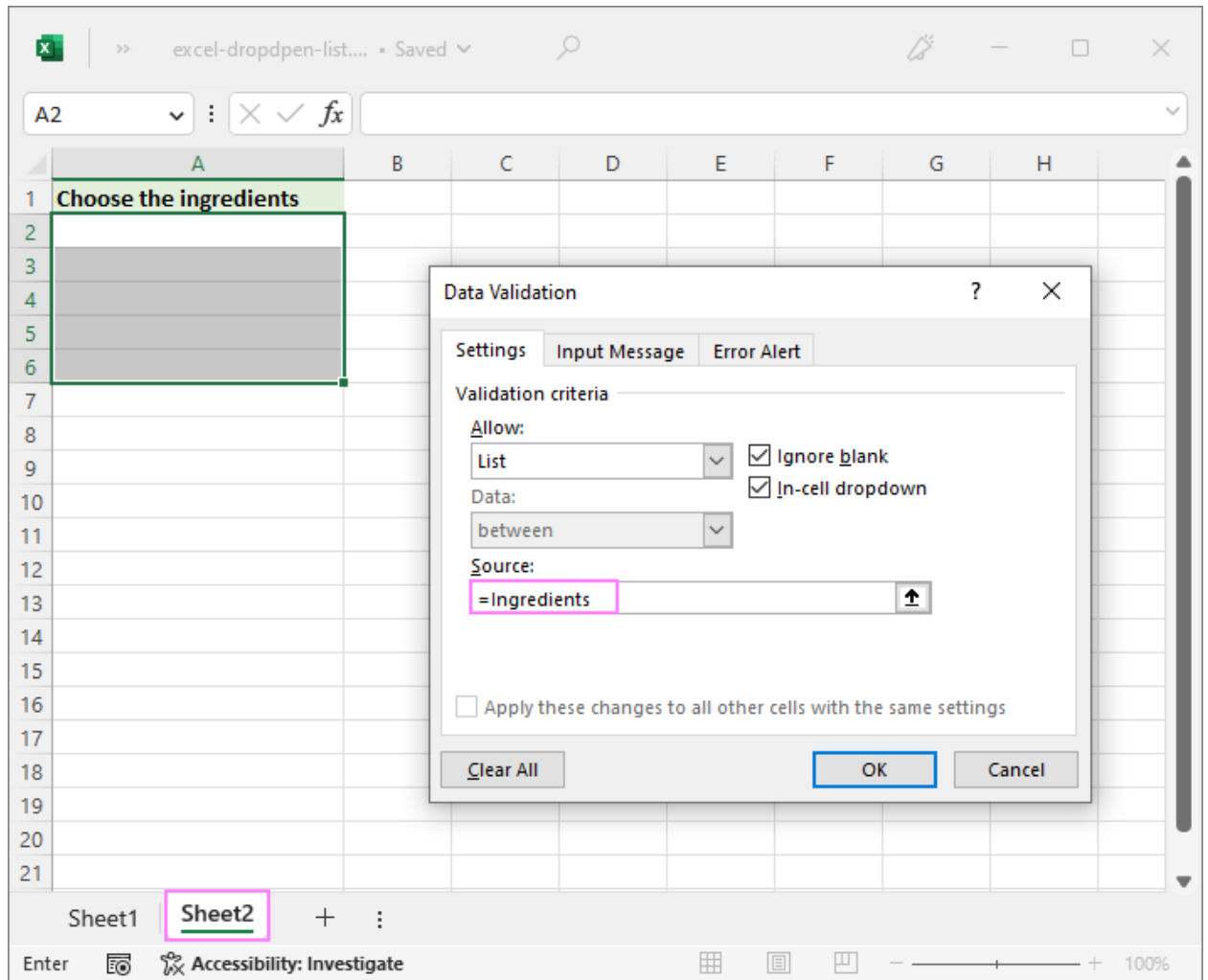
Tip. It's a good idea to sort the items alphabetically or in a custom order you want them to appear in the drop-down menu.

2. Create a named range. The fastest way is to select the cells and type the desired name directly in the *Name Box*. When finished, click **Enter** to save the newly created named range. For more information, please see [how to define a name in Excel](#).

As an example, let's create a range named *Ingredients*:



3. Select the cells for the picklist - on the same sheet as the named range or in a different worksheet.
4. Open the *Data Validation* dialog window and configure the rule:
 - In the *Allow* box, select **List**.
 - In the **Source** box, type an equals sign followed by the range name. In our case, it's *=Ingredients*.
 - Click *OK*.



Note. If your named range has at least one **blank cell**, leaving the *Ignore blank* box selected allows typing any value in the validated cell.

Advantages: If you insert multiple drop-downs in different sheets, named ranges will make them a lot easier to identify and manage.

Drawbacks: Takes a bit more time to set up.

Create drop-down from Excel table

Instead of using a named range, you can place the source data into a fully functional [Excel table](#). Why may you want to use a table? First and foremost,



because it lets you create an **expandable dynamic drop-down list** that updates automatically as you add or remove items to/from the table.

To make a dynamic dropdown from an Excel table, follow these steps:

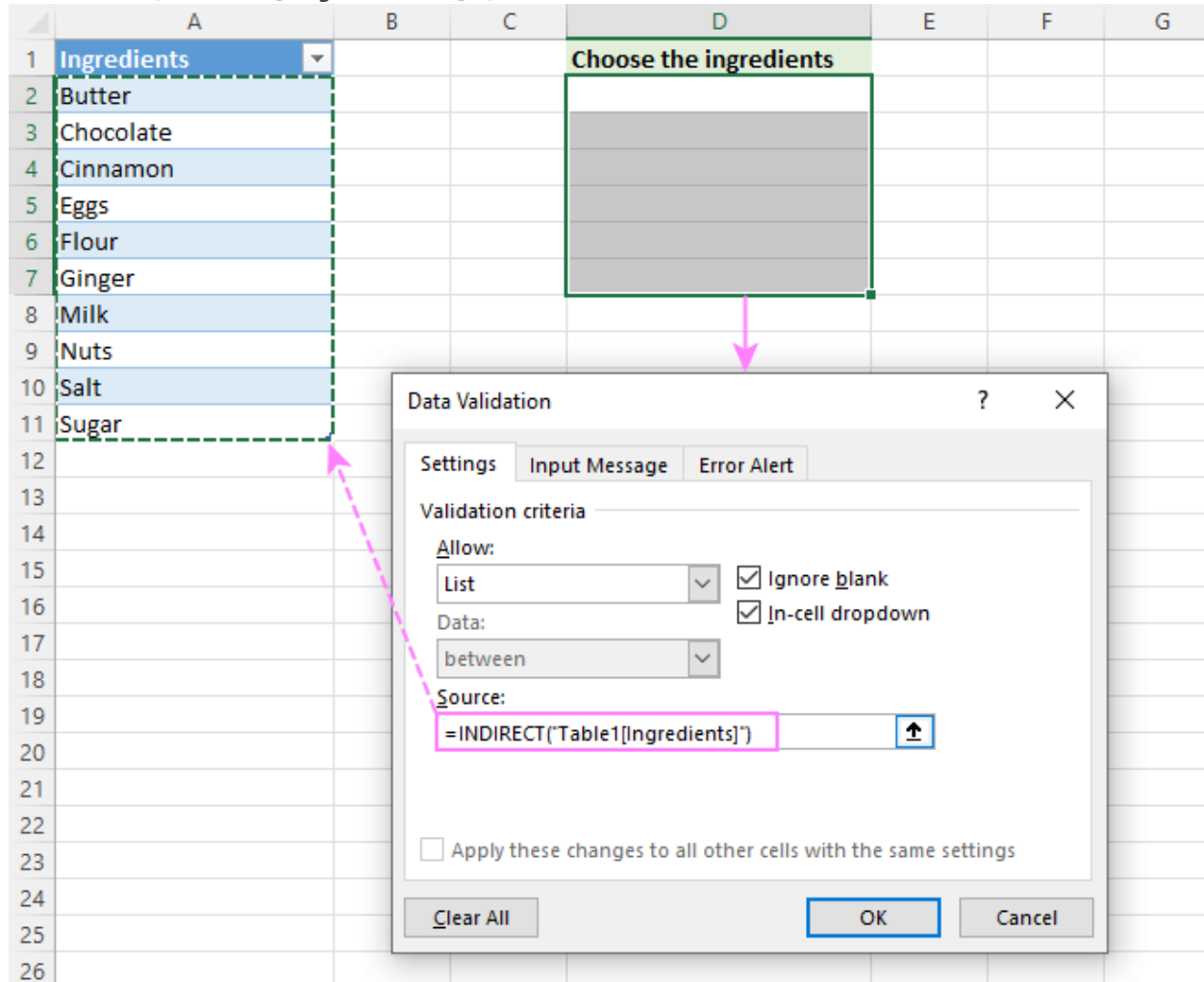
1. Type the list items in a table or convert an existing range to a table using the **Ctrl + T** shortcut.
2. Select the cell(s) where you wish to insert a dropdown.
3. Open the *Data Validation* dialog window.
4. Select *List* from the *Allow* drop-down box.
5. In the *Source* box, enter the formula referring to a specific column in your table, not including the header cell. For this, use the **INDIRECT** function with a **structured reference** like this:

```
=INDIRECT("Table_name[Column_name]")
```

6. When done, click *OK*.

For this example, we're making a dropdown menu from the column named *Ingredients* in *Table1*:

=INDIRECT ("Table1 [Ingredients] ")



The screenshot shows an Excel spreadsheet with a table of ingredients. The table has columns A through G and rows 1 through 26. The first column (A) contains a list of ingredients: Butter, Chocolate, Cinnamon, Eggs, Flour, Ginger, Milk, Nuts, Salt, and Sugar. The second column (B) is empty. The third column (C) is empty. The fourth column (D) has a header cell containing the text "Choose the ingredients" and a dropdown menu below it. The dropdown menu is currently empty. The Data Validation dialog box is open, showing the "Settings" tab. The "Validation criteria" section is set to "List" with "Ignore blank" and "In-cell dropdown" checked. The "Source" field contains the formula "=INDIRECT('Table1[Ingredients]')".

Advantages: Easy and quick way to insert an expandable dynamic drop down menu in Excel.

Drawbacks: Not found :)

How to create a dynamic dropdown list in Excel

If you regularly change the items in your picklist, the best approach is to create a **dynamic drop down list**. In this case, the list will update automatically in all the cells that contain whenever you add or remove items to/from the source list.



The fastest way to make a dynamic drop down in Excel is from a table as shown above. That is the default behavior of Excel tables; no extra settings or moves are required.

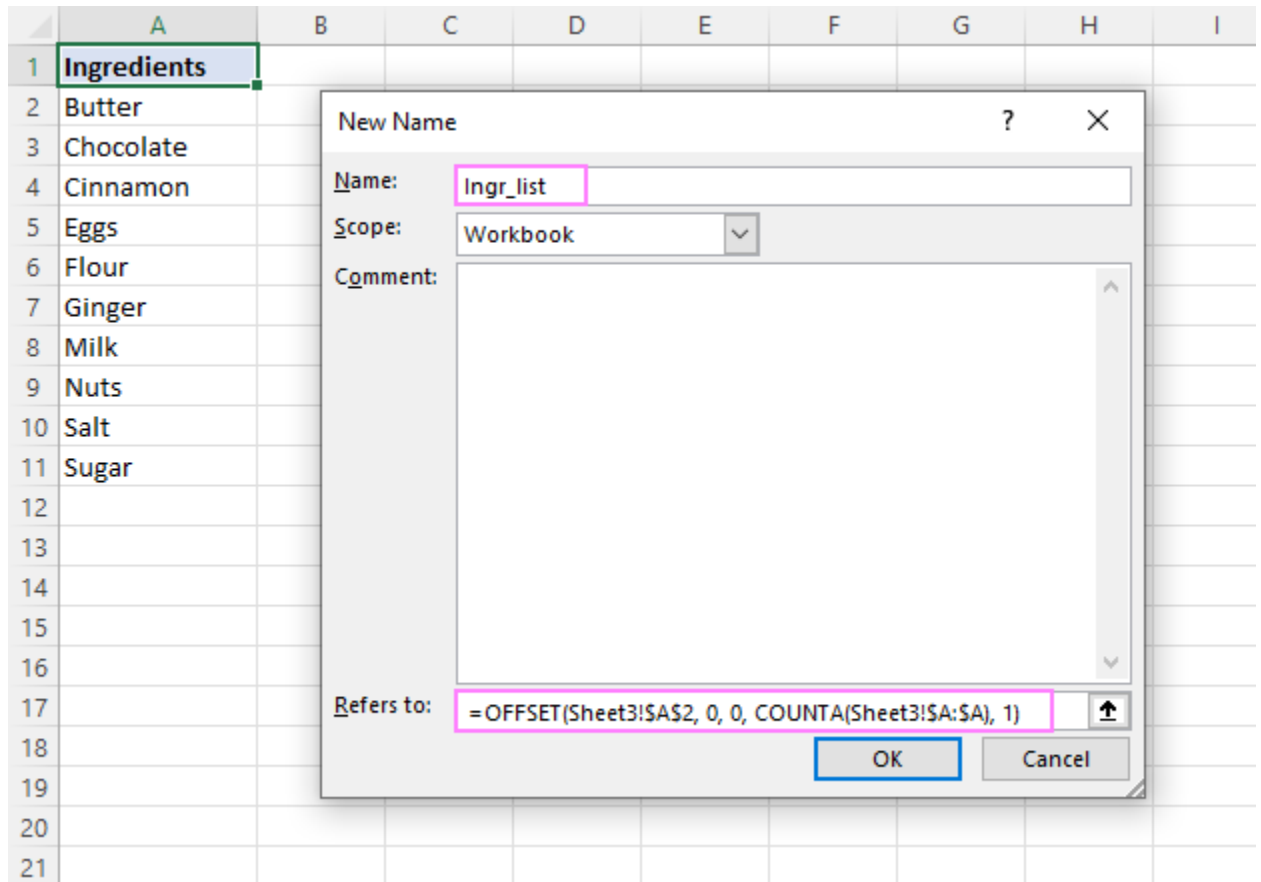
Another way is to use a regular named range and reference it with the OFFSET formula, as explained below.

1. Type the items for the drop down menu in separate cells.
2. Create a **named formula**. For this, press **Ctrl + F3** to open the *New Name* dialog box. Type the name you want in the *Name* box, and then enter the following formula in the *Refers to* box.

```
=OFFSET(Sheet3!$A$2, 0, 0, COUNTA(Sheet3!$A:$A), 1)
```

Where:

- Sheet3 - the sheet's name
- A - the column where the drop-down items are located
- \$A\$2 - the cell containing the first item

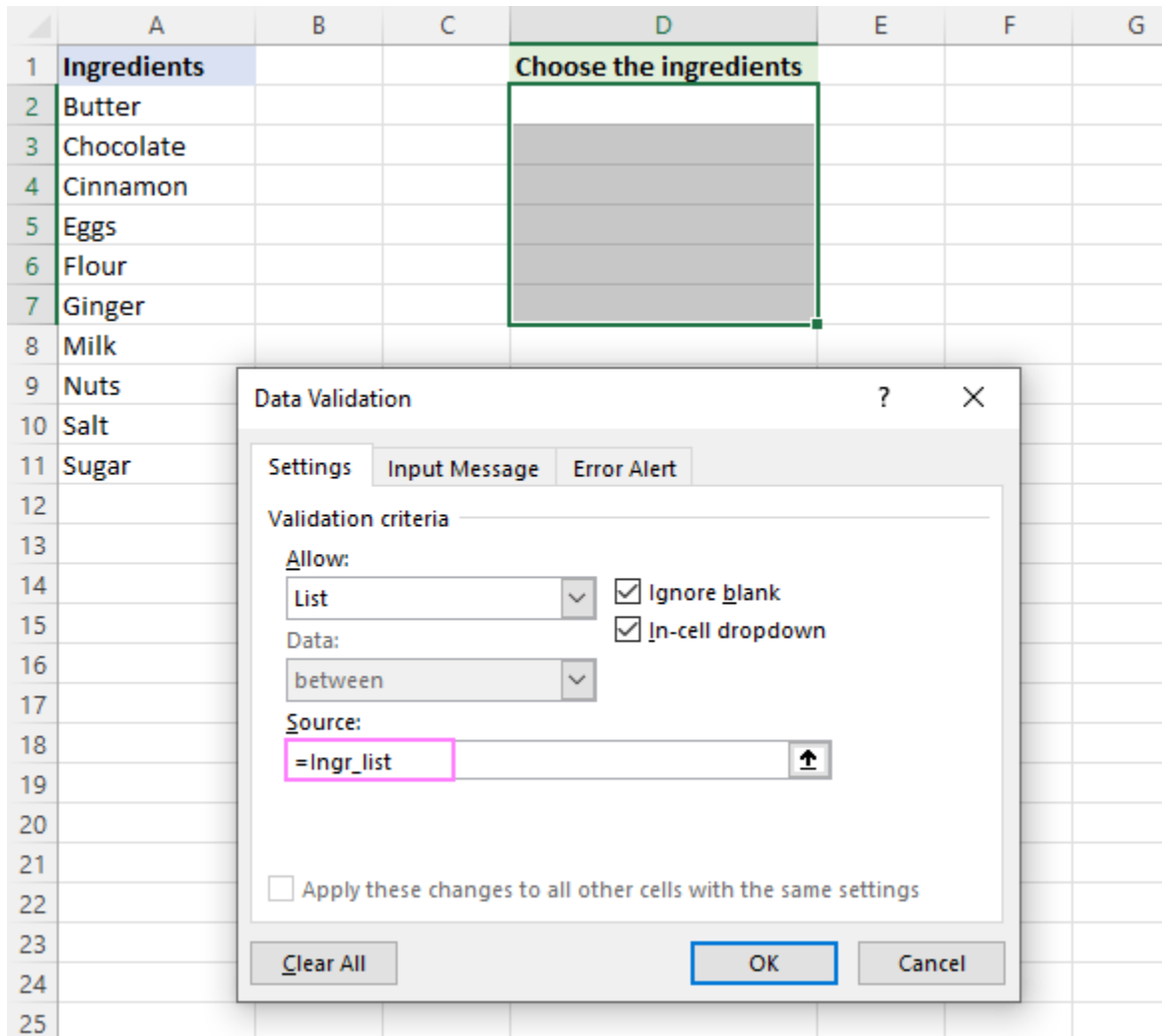


	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
1	Ingredients								
2	Butter								
3	Chocolate								
4	Cinnamon								
5	Eggs								
6	Flour								
7	Ginger								
8	Milk								
9	Nuts								
10	Salt								
11	Sugar								
12									
13									
14									
15									
16									
17									
18									
19									
20									
21									

New Name dialog box details:

- Name: Ingr_list
- Scope: Workbook
- Refers to: =OFFSET(Sheet3!\$A\$2, 0, 0, COUNTA(Sheet3!\$A:\$A), 1)

3. With the formula name defined, create a dropdown based on a named range as usual.



	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	Ingredients			Choose the ingredients			
2	Butter						
3	Chocolate						
4	Cinnamon						
5	Eggs						
6	Flour						
7	Ginger						
8	Milk						
9	Nuts						
10	Salt						
11	Sugar						
12							
13							
14							
15							
16							
17							
18							
19							
20							
21							
22							
23							
24							
25							

Data Validation dialog box settings:

- Settings: Input Message, Error Alert
- Validation criteria: Allow: List, Ignore blank (checked), In-cell dropdown (checked)
- Data: between
- Source: =Ingr_list
- Apply these changes to all other cells with the same settings:

How this formula works

The formula comprises two functions - **OFFSET** and **COUNTA**. The **COUNTA** function counts all non-blanks in the specified column. **OFFSET** uses that count for the *height* argument, so it returns a reference to a range that includes only non-empty cells, starting from the cell containing the first item that you supply for the *reference* argument.

Advantages: The main advantage of a dynamic drop-down list is that you won't have to change the reference to the named range each time the source list is expanded or contracted. You simply delete or type new entries in the source list, and your dropdown menu will update automatically!

Drawbacks: A bit complex setup process.



Make a dynamic dropdown list in Excel

Dynamic Array Excel has many innovative functions that are not available in older versions. One of these new functions named **UNIQUE** can help you create a dynamic drop-down with a simple formula.

Suppose you have a dataset with many repeated items like in column A in the image below. You aim to add a dropdown list where each item appears just once.

To extract the unique items, use this formula:

```
=UNIQUE (A2 : A21)
```

Optionally, you can sort the extracted values alphabetically by wrapping it in the **SORT** function:

```
=SORT (UNIQUE (A2 : A21) )
```



This dynamic array formula is entered just in one cell (E2) and it automatically **spills** into as many cells as needed to show all the unique items.

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Ingredients	In stock	Region		Unique items	
2	Milk	14	South		Butter	
3	Butter	21	North		Chocolate	
4	Nuts	22	North		Cinnamon	
5	Cinnamon	23	West		Eggs	
6	Milk	24	East		Flour	
7	Cinnamon	25	North		Ginger	
8	Flour	26	East		Milk	
9	Eggs	32	East		Nuts	
10	Ginger	36	East		Salt	
11	Chocolate	39	North		Sugar	
12	Chocolate	40	South			
13	Nuts	42	North			
14	Butter	49	South			
15	Salt	55	West			
16	Sugar	58	East			
17	Flour	61	South			
18	Ginger	66	West			
19	Eggs	74	West			
20	Salt	84	West			
21	Sugar	97	West			
22						

Next, you set up a drop down list using a **spill range reference**, which is a cell address followed by a hash character. In our case it's =\$E\$2# or =Sheet1!\$E\$2# if a

dropdown is in another sheet:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	Ingredients	In stock	Region		Unique items		Choose the ingredients	
2	Milk	14	South		Butter			
3	Butter	21	North		Chocolate			
4	Nuts	22	North		Cinnamon			
5	Cinnamon	23	West		Eggs			
6	Milk	24	East		Flour			
7	Cinnamon	25	North		Ginger			
8	Flour	26	East					
9	Eggs	32	East					
10	Ginger	36	East					
11	Chocolate	39	North					
12	Chocolate	40	South					
13	Nuts	42	North					
14	Butter	49	South					
15	Salt	55	West					
16	Sugar	58	East					
17	Flour	61	South					
18	Ginger	66	West					
19	Eggs	74	West					
20	Salt	84	West					
21	Sugar	97	West					
22								
23								
24								

Data Validation

Settings | Input Message | Error Alert

Validation criteria

Allow: List

Data: between

Source: =\$E\$2#

Ignore blank

In-cell dropdown

Apply these changes to all other cells with the same settings

Clear All | OK | Cancel

The result is an **expandable dynamic drop-down list** - the UNIQUE function automatically extracts new items as they are added to the source table, and the spill range reference forces Excel to update the drop-down list accordingly.

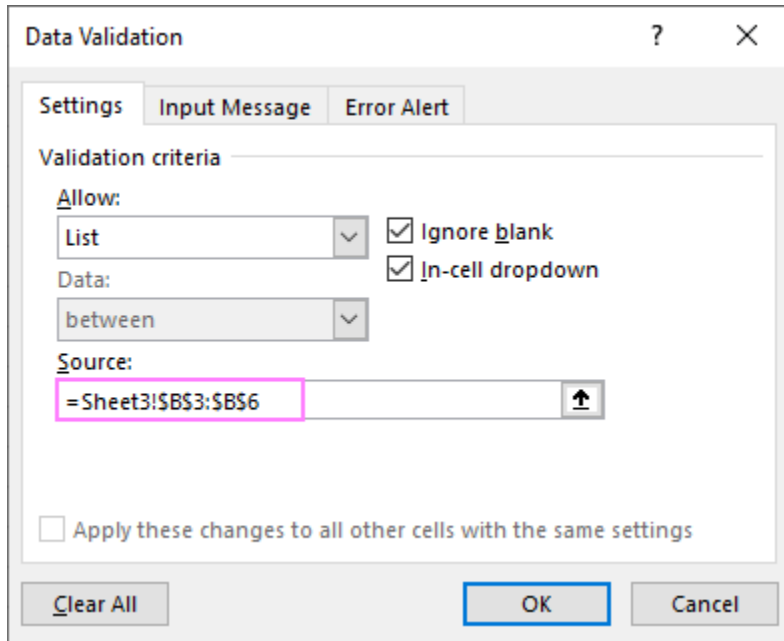
Tip. The same approach can be used to create a cascading drop-down list in Excel 365. For full details, please see [Make a dynamic dependent dropdown list an easy way](#).

How to create drop down list from another sheet

To insert a drop-down menu that pulls data from a different worksheet, you can use a normal range, named range or Excel table:

- When making a [dropdown menu from a named range](#), make sure the [scope of the name](#) is *Workbook*, and then set up a data validation list as usual.

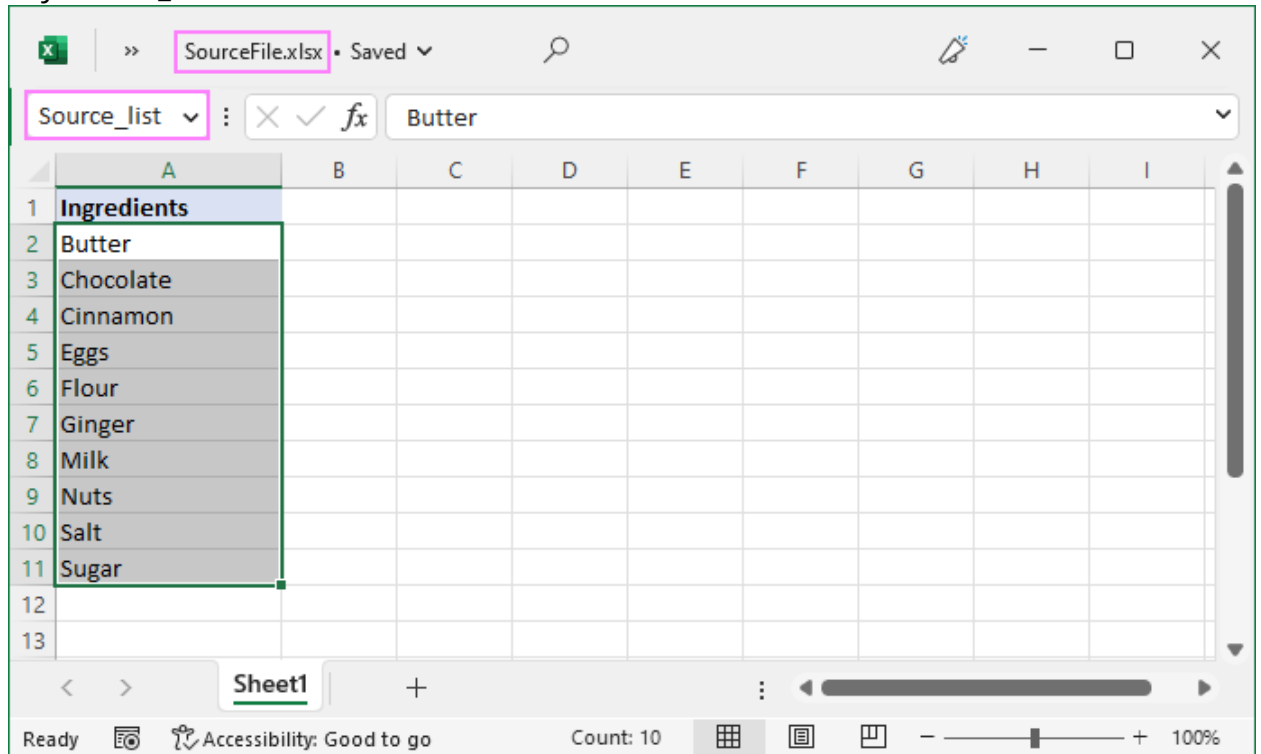
- When creating a **drop down list from a table**, no extra steps are needed as table names/references are valid across the entire workbook.
- If you insert a **drop down from a regular range**, include the sheet's name in the source reference. In the *Data Validation* dialog window, place the cursor in the *Source* box, switch to the other sheet and select the range containing the items. Excel will add the sheet name to the reference automatically.



How to make drop-down list from another workbook

To create a drop-down menu in Excel using a list from another workbook as the source, you will have to define 2 named ranges - one in the source workbook and the other in the workbook where you wish to insert your Data Validation list. The steps are:

1. In the source workbook, create a named range for the source list, say *Source_list*.



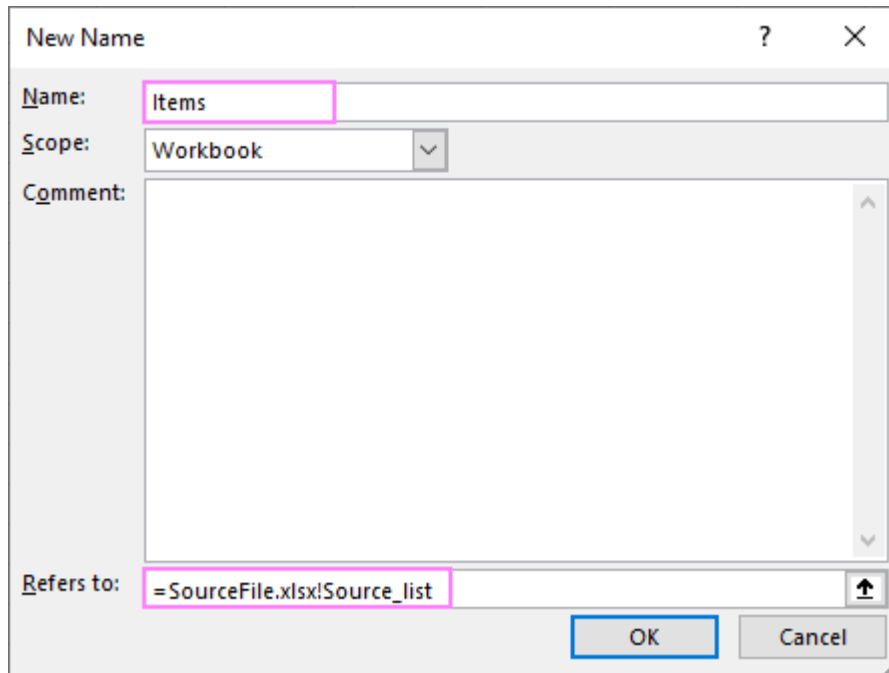
2. In the main workbook, define a name that references your source list. For this example, we create the name *Items* that refers to:

`=SourceFile.xlsx!Source_list`

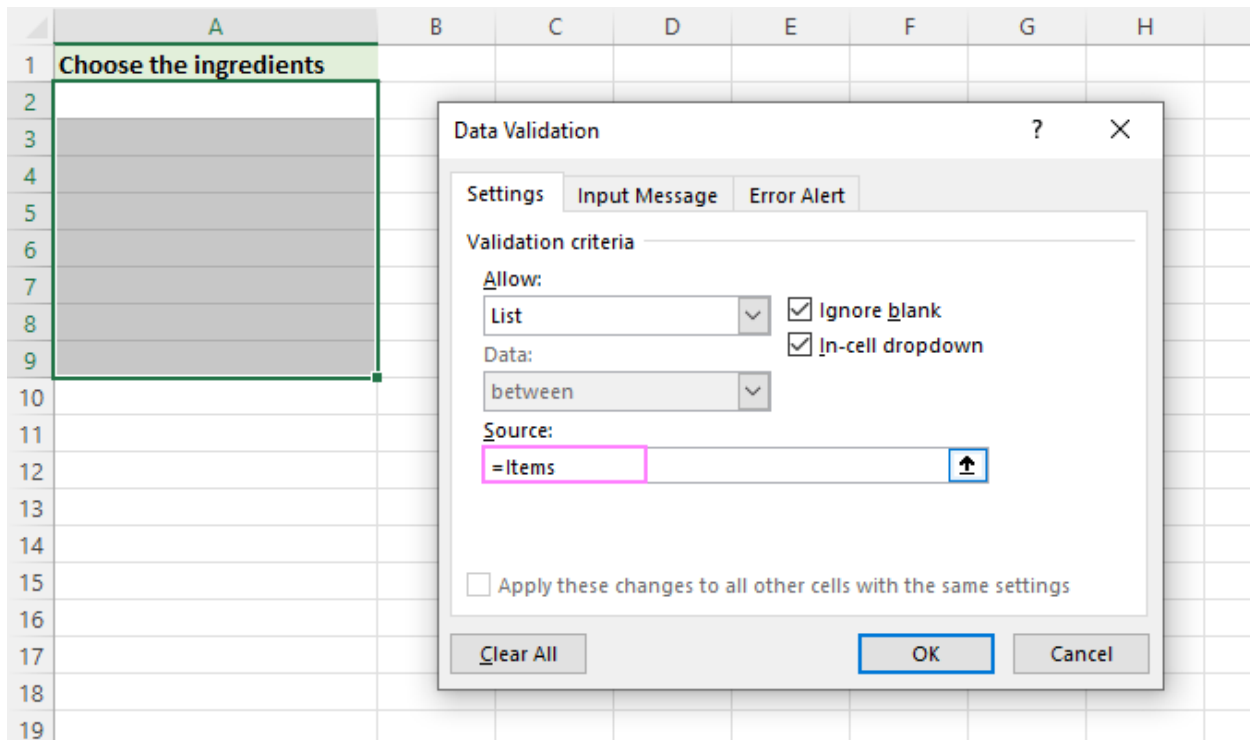
If the workbook's name contains spaces or non-alphabetical characters, it must be enclosed in single quotation marks like this:

`= 'Source File.xlsx' !Source_list`

For more details, please see [How to make external reference in Excel](#).



3. In the main workbook, select the cell(s) for your picklist and click the *Data tab > Data Validation*. In the *Source* box, reference the name you created in step 2. In our case, it's =Items.



Notes:



- For the drop-down list from another workbook to work, the source workbook must be open.
- The dropdown list created in this way won't update automatically when items are added to or removed from the source list - you will have to modify the source list reference manually.

How to make a dynamic dropdown from another workbook

To create a **dynamic dropdown list from another workbook**, define a formula name in the source workbook using the OFFSET formula explained in [Creating a dynamic drop-down in Excel](#). In this case, a dropdown menu in another workbook will be updated on the fly once any changes are made to the source list.

Searchable drop down list in Excel

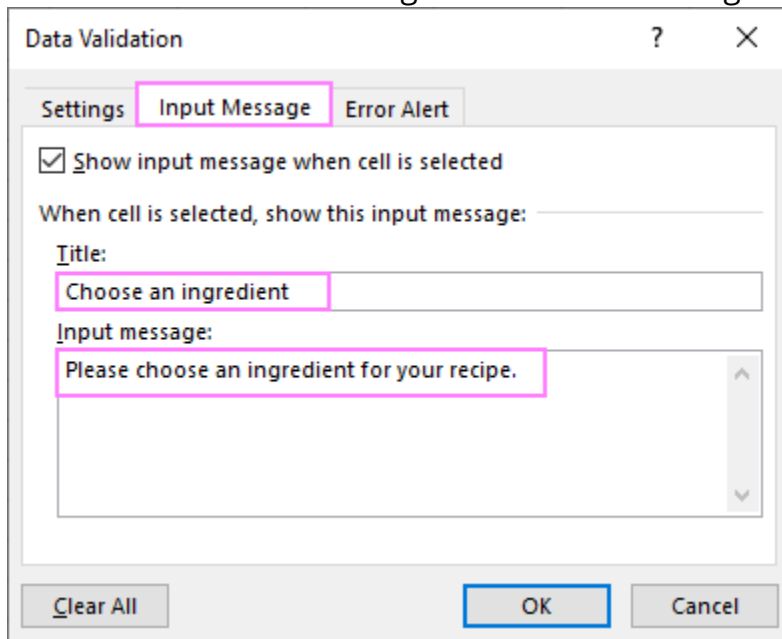
In Excel 365, data validation lists have an awesome **AutoComplete** feature. To speed up data entry in large lists, just start typing the target word in the dropdown menu cell - the autocomplete algorithm will match the typed substring with the dropdown list items and show you the found matches. As you type more characters, the displayed list is narrowed down, and conversely, when you remove characters, more matches are shown.

	A	B	C	D	E
1	Choose the ingredients				
2	Butter				
3	Chocolate				
4	Cinnamon				
5	Sugar				
6	Flour				
7	Ginger				
8	Milk				
9	Nuts				
10	s				
11	Salt				
12	Sugar				
13					
14					

Insert a drop down list with message

To show an information message when someone clicks a dropdown list cell, proceed in this way:

- In the *Data Validation* dialog box, switch to the *Input Message* tab.
- Make sure the *Show input message when cell is selected* option is checked.
- Type the title and message in the corresponding fields (up to 225 characters).
- Click *OK* to save the message and close the dialog.



The screenshot shows the 'Data Validation' dialog box with the 'Input Message' tab selected. The 'Show input message when cell is selected' checkbox is checked. The 'Title' field contains 'Choose an ingredient' and the 'Input message' field contains 'Please choose an ingredient for your recipe.' The dialog box has 'Clear All', 'OK', and 'Cancel' buttons at the bottom.



The resulting drop down list with message will look similar to this:

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Choose the ingredients					
2	Cinnamon					
3	Eggs					
4	Ginger					
5	Milk					
6	Nuts					
7	<input type="text"/>					
8						
9						
10						
11						
12						
13						
14						
15						

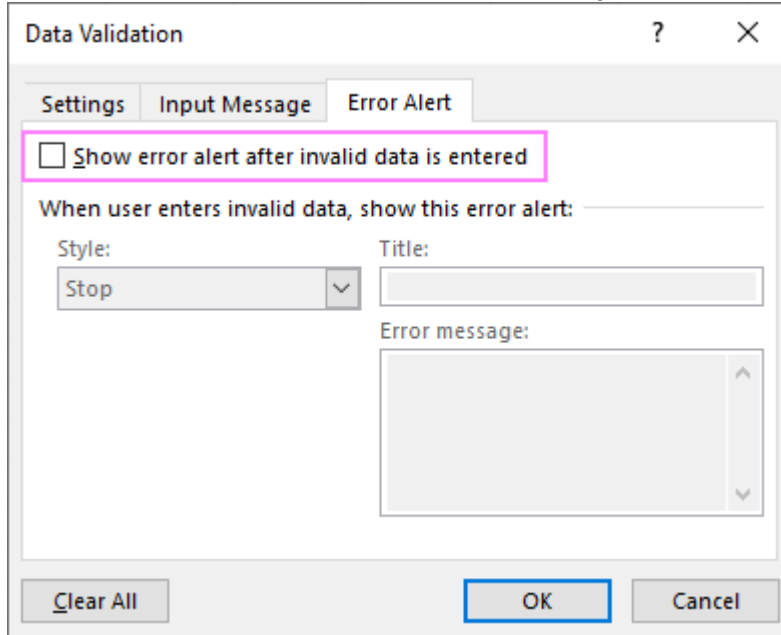
Choose an ingredient
Please choose an ingredient for your recipe.

Make an editable drop down list in Excel

By default, an Excel drop-down is non-editable, i.e. restricted to the values in the list itself. If you type any other value, an error alert will show up. However, you can allow users to enter their own values. Here's how:

1. Open the *Data Validation* dialog window.

2. On the *Error Alert* tab, uncheck the *Show error alert after invalid data is*

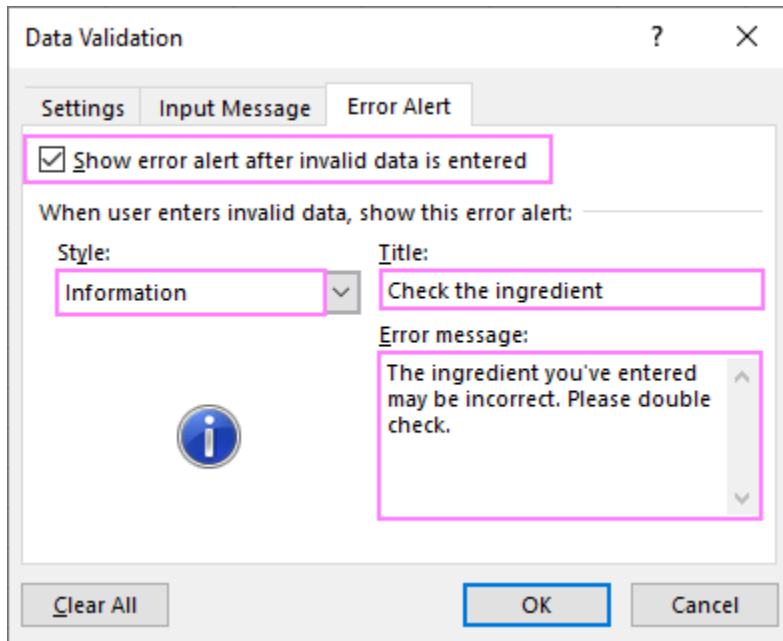


entered box.

Technically, this turns a drop-down list into a **combo box**. The term "combo box" means an editable dropdown that allows users to either select a value from the predefined list or type a custom value directly in the box.

Optionally, you can display a **warning message** when someone attempts to enter a value that is not in the list:

1. On the *Error Alert* tab, select the *Show error alert after invalid data is entered* option.
2. From the *Style* box, pick either *Information* or *Warning*, and then type the title and message text.
 - **Information** message is best to be used if there is nothing wrong with the user entering a custom value.
 - **Warning** message will induce users to select an item from the drop-down box rather than enter their own data, though it does not prohibit it.



And here's an editable Excel dropdown list with a warning message in action:

