10 tips
Nutrition Education Series

salt and sodium

10 tips to help you cut back

It's clear that Americans have a taste for salt, but salt plays a role in high blood pressure. Everyone, including kids, should reduce their sodium intake to less than 2,300 milligrams of sodium a day (about 1 teaspoon of salt). Adults age 51 and older, African Americans of any age, and individuals with high blood pressure, diabetes, or chronic kidney disease should further reduce their sodium intake to 1,500 mg a day.

1 think fresh

Most of the sodium Americans eat is found in processed foods. Eat highly processed foods less often and in smaller portions—especially cheesy foods, such as pizza; cured meats, such as bacon, sausage, hot dogs, and deli/luncheon meats; and ready-to-eat foods, like canned chili, ravioli, and soups. Fresh foods are generally lower in sodium.

2 enjoy home-prepared foods

Cook more often at home—where you are in control of what's in your food. Preparing your own foods allows you to limit the amount of salt in them.

3 fill up on veggies and fruits—they are naturally low in sodium

Eat plenty of vegetables and fruits—fresh or frozen. Eat a vegetable or fruit at every meal.

4 choose dairy and protein foods that are lower in sodium

Choose more fat-free or low-fat milk and yogurt in place of cheese, which is higher in sodium. Choose fresh beef, pork, poultry, and seafood, rather than those with salt added. Deli or luncheon meats, sausages, and canned products like corned beef are higher in sodium. Choose unsalted nuts and seeds.

5 adjust your taste buds

Cut back on salt little by little—and pay attention to the natural tastes of various foods. Your taste for salt will lessen over time.

6 skip the salt

Skip adding salt when cooking. Keep salt off the kitchen counter *and* the dinner table. Use spices, herbs, garlic, vinegar, or lemon juice to season foods or use no-salt seasoning mixes. Try black or red pepper, basil, curry, ginger, or rosemary.

7 read the label

Read the Nutrition Facts label and the ingredients statement to find packaged and canned foods lower in sodium. Look for foods labeled "low sodium," "reduced sodium," or "no salt added."

8 ask for low-sodium foods when you eat out

Restaurants may prepare lower sodium foods at your request and will serve sauces and salad dressings on the side so you can use less.

9 pay attention to condiments

Foods like soy sauce, ketchup, pickles, olives, salad dressings, and seasoning packets are high in sodium. Choose low-sodium soy sauce and ketchup. Have a carrot or celery stick instead of olives or pickles. Use only a sprinkling of flavoring packets instead of the entire packet.

10 boost your potassium intake

Choose foods with potassium, which may help to lower your blood pressure. Potassium is found in vegetables and fruits, such as potatoes, beet greens, tomato juice and sauce, sweet potatoes, beans (white, lima, kidney), and bananas. Other sources of potassium include yogurt, clams, halibut, orange juice, and milk.

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