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## Managing Your Salt Intake

Salt consumption is a hot topic in the media these days as more and more adults and children are being diagnosed with hypertension (high blood pressure). We can no longer ignore the facts. The results of the 2004 Canadian Community Health Survey indicate that 85% of men and 60% of women consume more than the upper daily limit of sodium (salt). Children are also eating way too much salt, with 77% of children exceeding the recommended daily intake.

It is important for adults and children to limit salt intake and to have their blood pressure checked regularly. Having uncontrolled high blood pressure can cause damage to blood vessels. This damage can cause plaque to build up, which narrows the blood vessels. When blood vessels are narrow the heart has to work harder to pump blood to the body. Eating too much salt can cause the body to retain water, making it necessary for the heart work even harder. An over-worked heart can become weak and will not pump as effectively. Very high blood pressure can cause a blood vessel to burst and bleed into the brain, which is called a stroke. We tend to think of people having strokes when they are elderly, however, anyone including a child can have a stroke. Reducing the amount of salt (sodium) in your diet and your families diet can help to reduce the risk of high blood pressure, heart disease and stroke.

For years now, health care providers have been urging patients to get rid of the saltshakers, to stop adding salt when cooking, and to cut down on salty processed foods. Foods that are processed are those that you order in fast food restaurants and those that are in cans or packages and contain additives like salt. Here is a list of some processed foods containing salt:

- Pizza
- Burgers, Hotdogs, Sandwiches
- Soups
- Pasta
- Poultry
- Potatoes
- Cheese
- Cereals
- Beef
- Sauces

According to the Institute of Medicine, the newest recommendations for daily sodium intake is as follows:

### **Institute of Medicine Recommended Daily Sodium Intake**

Children 1-3 years – 1,000 milligrams (mg) daily

Children 4-8 years – 1,200 mg

People 9-50 years – 1,500 mg

Adults 51-70 years – 1,300 mg

Seniors over 70 yrs – 1,200mg

You can begin to make healthy food choices by reading product labels. Here is how to determine how much sodium is in the food you plan to eat. First, you always need to check the serving size at the top of the Nutritional Facts Label. On the label below, the nutritional facts are based on eating one cup of the product. The label tells you that for every cup you eat, you are going to consume 650 milligrams of sodium (salt). Often the serving size listed is far less than what you would normally eat as one serving. You have to take this into consideration when deciding if the food is a healthy choice. If you plan to eat two cups of this product you will be consuming double the amount of sodium listed on the product label, or 1,300 mg. This is equal to the total recommended amount of salt that an adult between 51 and 70 years of age should be eating in a whole day and is not a good food choice.

Nutrition Facts	
<b>Per 1 cup (264g)</b>	
Amount	
Calories	260
Fat	13g
Cholesterol	30mg
<b>Sodium</b>	<b>650 mg</b>
Carbohydrates	31g
Protein	5g

If you see ‘Reduced Sodium,’ written on a food package, this does not mean the product is a low sodium product. ‘Reduced Sodium’ means that there is 25% less salt in the product. If the product has high sodium content to begin with, it may still have high sodium content even with 25% less salt. Low sodium foods contain less than 140mg of sodium per serving. The best food choice is one that is sodium free.

Each food product you buy should provide a list of ingredients. The closer the ingredient is to the top of the list the more of that ingredient there is in the product. There are several ingredients that contain salt, so check the ingredient list carefully for any of the following:

- Di-Sodium Phosphate
- Monosodium Glutamate (MSG)
- Sodium Benzoate
- Sodium Citrate
- Sodium Nitrate
- Sodium Alginate
- Celery, garlic, onion or sea salts
- Baking Soda
- Baking Powder
- Soya Sauce
- Brine (mixture of salt and water)
- Sodium Saccharin

A common complaint about a low salt diet is that the food tastes bland. This may be the case until you get used to the change in your diet. When you eat a low salt diet over time you will begin to taste when food is being over salted, helping you to avoid these foods. In the scheme of things, cutting down on the amount of salt you consume is a very small sacrifice to make in order to help prevent health problems.

Here are some basic tips to help you reduce your salt intake:

- There are many heart smart, low salt cookbooks available in bookstores to help you with meal planning but you can use all your favourite recipes, just leave out the salt.
- Eat more unprocessed, fresh fruits and vegetables – one dill pickle can contain more salt than the recommended total daily sodium limit, eat a fresh cucumber instead.
- Even bottled water contains sodium so check the labels
- Avoid buying frozen packages of meat, fish and poultry which contain salt and other additives, eat fresh, unprocessed meats, fish and poultry
- Reduce your reliance on take-out and fast foods – plan your low salt meals so you have some leftovers for lunches the next day. This will reduce salt and save money.
- Avoid the canned and processed food aisles at the store - if you must use canned foods, drain and rinse the food well before serving to remove some of the salt
- Never add salt to your take out or restaurant food because it is already heavily salted
- Spice up your food with fresh or dried herbs or a salt substitute
- Use up your boxes of salt on your icy steps this winter instead of on your food!!

It's time to take control of your salt intake before your salt intake takes control of your health and your life.

To learn more about reading product labels you can visit the Canadian Diabetes Association – Nutritional Labelling Education Centre at: <http://www.healthyeatingisinstore.ca>

To learn more about the eating habits of Canadians you can visit the Statistics Canada website at: <http://www.statcan.ca> and type 'eating habits' into the search box, click on search and a list of good articles will appear.

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Information Sources:

- Canadian Stroke Network <http://www.canadianstrokenetwork.ca>
- Institute of Medicine 2004, Dietary reference intakes for water, potassium, sodium, chloride and sulfate, Washington DC: National Academy Press.
- Heart and Stroke Foundation <http://www2.heartandstroke.ca>
- Statistics Canada <http://www.statcan.ca>