Dietary Sodium Too High? Truth About Replacing It

Dietary Sodium and Relationship to High Blood Pressure
Every one out of three adults in the United States of America has high blood pressure. It’s often called the silent killer because persons with it have no symptoms for years. Then suddenly they die with massive heart attacks. This accounts for 49 percent of the cardiovascular disease cases. High blood pressure is also a risk factor for type 2 diabetes.

Every person with cardiovascular disease may not have a connection between increased blood pressure and salt intake. Estimates are that 30 to 50 percent of those with high blood pressure are salt-sensitive.

The Dietary Reference Intakes for Nutrients recommend to eat from 1.3 to 1.5 grams (g)/day with an upper limit of no more than 2.3 g/day for the average American. African Americans and middle to older aged adults are at a greater risk for developing high blood pressure so they should eat no more than the 1.3 to 1.5 g of sodium daily. But most Americans eat from 3 to 4 g of sodium daily. Most of dietary sodium is consumed in form of sodium chloride or table salt.

Role of Sodium in the Body
Most of the sodium in the body if found in the blood. It maintains fluid balance and nerve transmission. Rarely is there a deficiency, but during extreme heat, fatigue can be caused by profuse sweating, vomiting and diarrhea.

Sodium Sources
The good news is, you can obtain all the sodium needed through a variety of foods. If you happen to have sodium-sensitive high blood pressure, you should also be aware that these same foods that are higher in sodium content should be limited. Table salt, cheddar cheese, ham, many snack food, most processed foods which contain either sodium chloride or sodium benzoate/phosphate should be eaten in minimum amounts.

Options to Lower Sodium
1. Read food labels and use as a guide. When you’re buying a food product, look at the Nutrition Facts and the ingredients list on the label. Find the symbol Na or the words sodium, salt or soda, and see how much is in that food.
   • When selecting foods in the grocery store, look for: Single foods with no more than 400 milligrams of sodium in a single serving
   • Entrees with no more than 800 milligrams of sodium.
2. Some ways to reduce the amount of sodium in recipes are:
   a. In recipes, use only half the salt recommended. For example, if a recipe calls for $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon, use only $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon.
   b. Gradually reduce the amount of salt each time you make a recipe so that over time you get used to a less salty flavor. However, do not eliminate salt from yeast bread or rolls; it is essential for the flavor and yeast action. It also helps the texture.
c. When cooking pasta, noodles or rice, do not add salt to the water.

d. Use the low-salt or no-salt version of your ingredients when you can. For instance, instead of using garlic salt, use garlic powder or minced garlic. You could also buy a low-salt version of steak sauce.

3. Follow the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet with twice the average number of servings of vegetables and fruits increasing the salt-to-potassium ratio of 1 to 1 which can help lower your blood pressure some. See the complete DASH Healthy Meal Plan at: http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/hbp/prevent/h_eating/h_eating.htm

4. Ask your dietitian or doctor if you should use salt substitutes such as potassium chloride.

Salt Substitutes – Why Check with Dietitian or Doctor?

1. **Potassium-Based Substitutes**: Most substitutes have potassium chloride or other sodium-containing substitutes (sodium bicarbonate can be used by potassium-based ingredients); Persons with chronic kidney disease should not use these potassium based sodium substitutes as they may have difficulty filtering too much potassium;

2. **Magnesium Salt-Based Substitutes**: Although uncommon, magnesium sulfate in excess can inhibit bones hardening. Taking excess amounts or eating in excess is also of concern for those with kidney disease; and

3. **“Lite” Salt or Low Sodium Salt Substitutes**: Blend of sodium and potassium chloride so it has a dual effect and can be helpful in cooking because it lowers the sodium and increases the potassium at the same time.

If your symptoms of high blood pressure persist and are severe, see a registered dietitian and/or other health professionals for treatment and medical advice.

Contact ______________________, Texas AgriLife Extension Service ____________ County agent at ________________, for more information.

References:


Mary Kinney Bielamowicz, PhD, RD,LD, Professor and Nutrition Specialist, Department of Nutrition and Food Science, Texas A&M University System, Summer, 2009.