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Living Well

Chelsea Richmond, Family and Consumer Sciences Agent
K-State Research and Extension, Flint Hills District

Sodium in Your Diet

You have probably heard that most Americans eat too much salt. Salt contains sodium and too much sodium can raise blood pressure—which has a potential for serious health consequences. It is recommended that individuals, including kids, reduce their sodium intake to less than 2,300 milligrams (mg) 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. Consider the following tips for reducing the amount of sodium in your diet.

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

***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.

***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.

***Fill up on fruits and veggies.** Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables—fresh or frozen—as these are naturally low in sodium.

***Add flavor without adding sodium.** Keep the 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.

***Give sodium the “rinse.”** Rinse sodium-containing canned foods, such as tuna, beans, and vegetables before using. This helps to remove some of the sodium.

***Examine your dairy products.** Choose fat-free or low-fat milk products, such as milk, yogurt, cheese, and fortified soy beverages (often called soymilk) in place of processed cheese products and spreads, which are higher in sodium.

***Pay attention to condiments.** The sodium in soy sauce, ketchup, salad dressings, and seasoning packets can add up. Choose lite or reduced sodium soy sauce and no-salt-added ketchup, add oil and vinegar to a salad rather than bottled salad dressings, and use only a small amount of seasoning from flavoring packets instead of the entire packet.

***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.

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

For more information on reducing your sodium intake, visit choosemyplate.gov. You can also contact the Flint Hills Extension District office in Cottonwood Falls at (620) 273-6491 or the office in Council Grove at (620) 767-5136.

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