

Heart Smart Cooking

LATEST TREND IN HEART SMART LIFESTYLE—SLASH THE SODIUM

(NAPSA)—When you think about a heart-healthy diet, fat and cholesterol are probably the first things that come to mind. For instance, cutting back on high-cholesterol foods, swapping good fats for artery-clogging saturated and trans fats, choosing lean meats, changing to lower-fat dairy products and eating more good carbs are all recommended for living a healthy lifestyle. However, perhaps the most overlooked, and most challenging, heart-smart tactic is slashing sodium from the diet.

Everyone needs sodium, but most people consume far too much. Sodium causes the body to retain water, which increases the pressure inside blood vessels. Having high blood pressure damages blood vessels, increases the heart's workload and sharply raises the risk for heart ailments. Eating a healthy diet that is low in sodium can help keep blood pressure in check.

The 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends that we eat no more than 2,300 mg of sodium per day (about 1 tsp of salt). Processed foods including soups, condiments, sauces, canned vegetables, frozen meals, lunchmeats, packaged noodle and rice mixes, baked goods and snack foods can quickly bust your sodium budget, so compare labels and choose brands with the least sodium.

Salt is often used not to flavor foods itself but to turn up the volume on other flavors, so it is possible to boost flavor with less salt. Here are some tips to shake the salt habit:

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- Reduce the amount of salt



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added to recipes. Start by using 25 percent less and gradually cut back more over time. When reducing salt in recipes, increase the amount of herbs and spices, or try using a salt-free seasoning such as Mrs. Dash.

- Add acids such as a squeeze of lemon juice or splash of vinegar to vegetables, fish and soups to replicate the effect of salt.

- Cut back on the amount of salt and soy sauce used in marinades. Add flavor with herbs and spices, fruit juice, wine or flavored vinegars, or use a ready-made low-sodium marinade such as Mrs. Dash.

- Choose fresh or plain frozen vegetables and add your own seasonings.

- Make your own rice dishes instead of using prepackaged mixes. Cook the rice in low-sodium vegetable or chicken broth, and add flavor with a splash of olive oil and some onion, mushrooms, celery and herbs.

Learn more about heart health at www.americanheart.org. Find more salt-reduction tips and recipes at www.mrsdash.com.