

Teacher's guide to: **You CAN lower your blood pressure.**  
This is NOT a patient hand out.

There are two main ways to achieve a mild sodium intake:

Use no added salt of any kind and eat moderately of higher sodium foods.  
Use a measured amount of added salt, but AVOID the higher sodium foods.

In this handout, I have taken the approach that a limited amount of added salt provides more control over when the patient wants to add salt. The idea that no salt is used in cooking, just at the table, is a simple one. Salt receptors are on the tip of your tongue; salt cooked in foods is not always easily tasted, salt on foods is the first thing you taste. This should lower the amount of salt added. A very practical idea is to have the hypertensive patient use his/her own salt shaker that is emptied out each morning. Measure with cooking measuring spoons a  $\frac{1}{4}$  or  $\frac{1}{2}$  - teaspoon of salt and put in the empty shaker. This salt is to be used throughout the day. No more can be added and none should be held over for the next day. A  $\frac{1}{4}$  tsp of salt is for a "2 gm sodium restriction" a  $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp of salt is for a 4 gm sodium restriction.

The word sodium is used in this handout because this is what the patient will see on the label. The term sodium and salt are not the same. Salt is sodium chloride (40% of it is sodium). The Rule 180 mg of sodium is for a single food. Frozen dinners that may be heart healthy and include several servings would then need to follow the standard of 500 mg sodium or less.

The foods in the **NO** column are the areas of highest sodium in the average diet. The replacement foods in the **YES** column require some knowledge of cooking, however, some very basic skills can achieve the objective. A crock pot is invaluable for cooking meats, especially for a single person or a very busy person who doesn't want to spend a lot of time cooking.

The alternatives for salty snack foods also include: pop corn seasoned only with oil (can add a little sugar) or some of the salt allotment for the day. The fruits and vegetables are emphasized because the recent research on diet and hypertension have stressed that potassium can also have a positive effect on hypertension. This along with low fat calcium sources or adequate calcium supplementation is important.

Frozen vegetables should be emphasized as being convenient like canned vegetables. Cooked beans are also very nutritious, high fiber and not labor intensive.

Evaluating packaged foods and instant mixes requires reading or recognizing the word sodium in the ingredient list. If there is no nutrition label information on sodium, then it shouldn't appear in the first three words of the list. Also looking for MSG (Monosodium Glutamate) is important. Generally, the less processed a food the less salt will be in it.

## Teachers' guide to: You CAN lower your blood pressure- page 2

Canned, smoked, cured and processed meats and cheese should always be restricted. On a mild restriction, natural style fresh meat and cheeses should be used no more than twice a day.

Spices with salt in the name should be restricted. Most commercially prepared sauces, dressings, etc are not low enough for the diet, especially if the measured salt shaker is used. Also Meat tenderizers and marinades can have a high salt content, so using natural tenderizers like, wine, vinegar, lemon juice pineapple juice combined with spices like ginger, garlic, herbs and pepper can make good marinades . Yogurt is also a good tenderizer but should be rinsed off of the meat prior to cooking as it is high in sodium.

Alternative spices are very important to learn about. Changing a salt habit will likely work best gradually. Introducing a new herb or spice a week will help with blandness. When using garlic: don't add it in a blender or a food processor- it will be too strong instead, chop or crush it. The finer you chop it, the stronger the flavor. When peeling a garlic clove, lay the clove on the cutting board. Lay the flat side of the knife on top and pound gently. The thick peeling should split and is easy to remove. Browning onions adds better flavor. Dried spices need to be crushed –this can be done by rubbing the leaves in the palm of your hand -prior to using in cooking. Start with ¼ teaspoon if you are trying it out for the first time, then increase to taste the next time you use it.

Using vinegar or lemon juice as a seasoning can be helpful in a variety of dishes: potatoes, beans, salads, fish chicken and meats. Balsamic vinegar (a very dark, brown, fermented vinegar) is good to marinate meats in before cooking as well

Encourage your patient that by picking one change and doing it over time , they will be able to improve their diets while getting accustomed to it . The taste bud is very teachable; it can learn new tricks and will actually enjoy the healthier eating as time goes by.