



## **Lowering your salt intake = lowering your blood pressure**

Nearly all people in the Americas eat far too much salt. Many adults and often children are eating over 2 times the amount considered safe for health. Limiting your use of table salt and eating less pre prepared foods high in salt can help keep you healthier. If you are over the age of 45, of African descent or have diabetes, hypertension, kidney or heart disease, your health is more at risk from high dietary salt than other people.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends dietary salt intake of less than 5 grams per day for healthy adults, equivalent to 2000 milligrams of sodium, or just less than one teaspoon of salt.

High blood pressure or “hypertension” is a major risk factor for heart attack, heart failure, stroke, and kidney disease and is the leading risk for death in the world. In the Americas, depending on the country, between one-fifth and one-third of adults have hypertension and no matter where they live, over 90% of people living to age 80 can expect to develop hypertension. People in Latin America and the Caribbean have some of the highest rates of hypertension in the world.

Up to one-third of people who have high blood pressure have it because they eat too much salt. High salt diets have also been linked to stomach cancer, worsening of asthma, thinning and weakening of our bones, kidney stones and to obesity because salty foods cause thirst that we often quench with high-calorie soft drinks.

If you cut your salt intake to less than 5 grams per day, you can keep your blood pressure from going up and as you get older, this can help you to avoid hypertension. A low-salt diet could prevent up to 1 in 4 heart attacks and/or strokes.

## **Can eating a low salt, well balanced diet be as effective as taking a blood pressure medication?**

If you have hypertension, reducing salt in your diet can reduce your blood pressure by about half as much as a blood pressure medication. Those who are 45 years or older, of African descent, overweight, have diabetes or chronic kidney disease are likely to have a larger decrease in blood pressure if they eat less salt. Talk to a health care professional before changing your treatment of hypertension.

## **Tips to help lower your salt intake**

There are many small changes you can make in your food choices that will help lower your salt intake. **Aim for less than 5 grams of salt a day or 2000 milligrams of sodium.**

### **When shopping**

- Buy fresh or frozen, unprocessed foods most often.
- Look for foods labeled “salt-free”, “no added salt”, “low in salt”, or “reduced in salt”. In these labels sodium is the same as salt.
- Whenever possible, choose food stores whose products have nutrition labels and purchase foods with the lowest amount of salt.
  - Read the food labels. The amount of salt or sodium is shown “per serving” and many people eat more than one serving. Try to choose foods with less than 0.25 grams of salt per serving and avoid foods with more than 1 gram per serving. Remember, you are aiming for less than 5 grams of salt a day, or 2000 milligrams of sodium.

### **When at home**

- Cut down on salt at the table and while cooking. Instead use low-salt seasoning or no-salt mixes, or salt substitutes.
- Use only small amounts of condiments such as ketchup, mustard, soy sauce, pickles, olives, gravies and salad dressings that are high in salt
- Plan meals at least a day in advance. Find quick meal ideas in cookbooks and on-line, to avoid last minute purchases of pre prepared food products that are typically highly salted.
- Rinse canned foods in fresh cold water before cooking or eating.
- Do more home cooking from scratch. Limit reliance on processed foods such as canned or dried soups, canned vegetables, frozen dinners, "instant" foods and flavored rice/pasta packages.

### **When Eating Out**

- Ask for less salt to be added to your food when eating at restaurants.
- Eat less fast foods and take-out meals.

**To stay healthy, check your blood pressure regularly.  
Normal Blood Pressure: 115/75 mmHg**