



## Reducing Dietary Salt to Improve Health in the Americas:

### Patient/Consumer Fact Sheet



#### Cutting your salt = lowering your blood pressure

Nearly all people in the Americas eat far too much salt. Many adults and often children are eating over twice the amount considered safe for health. Cutting out table salt and eating less pre prepared foods high in salt will 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.

For a healthy diet, eat less than 5 grams of salt per day, equivalent to 2000 milligrams of sodium.

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 if current circumstances continue. People in Latin America and the Caribbean have some of the highest rates of hypertension in the world.



About 30% of people with hypertension would have normal blood pressure and the rest would have better blood pressure control if they reduced their salt intake to a healthy level. Too much salt in the diet causes about 10% of cardiovascular disease and has also been linked to stomach cancer, worsening of asthma, thinning and weakening of our bones (osteoporosis), kidney stones and also obesity because salty foods cause thirst that we often quench with soft drinks high in sugar.

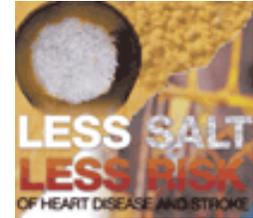
If you cut your salt to less than 5 grams per day, you can keep your blood pressure from going up and as you get older, this can help you to avoid hypertension. A low-salt diet could prevent up to 1 in 4 heart attacks and/or strokes.

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

If you have hypertension, eating less salt can lower 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 you eat less salt

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.
- Whenever possible, choose food products that have nutrition labels.

 Read the label. 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 less than 2000 milligrams of sodium. On these labels sodium is the same as salt.

- Look for food products marked “salt-free”, “no added salt”, “low in salt”, or “reduced in salt” then double check the label for the actual amount of salt contained.
- When you buy processed foods, choose those with the lowest amount of salt or 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 (e.g. potassium chloride instead of sodium chloride).
- Use only small amounts of condiments such as ketchup, mustard, soy sauce, pickles, olives, gravies and salad dressings that are high in salt. Instead use lemon juice, fresh garlic, spices, herbs and flavored vinegars.
- 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.
- For snacks choose unsalted brands or fruit.
- 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

- Commercially prepared meals often have hidden salt in that there is no information about how much salt is contained. Ask for less salt to be added to your food when eating at restaurants.
- Eat less fast foods and take-out meals.

For more information, go to [www.paho.org/cncd\\_cvd/salt](http://www.paho.org/cncd_cvd/salt)

To stay healthy, check your blood pressure regularly.

Normal Blood Pressure<sup>1,2</sup>: <120/<80 mmHg

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<sup>1</sup> A.V. Chobanian et al. The Seventh Report of the Joint National Committee on Prevention, Detection, Evaluation, and Treatment of High Blood Pressure. *Hypertension*. 2003;42:1206-1252

<sup>2</sup> World Health Organization (WHO), International Society of Hypertension Writing Group. 2003 WHO/ISH statement of management of hypertension. *J Hypertens*. 2003;21(11):1983-1992