



NUTRITION CONNECTION

PROMOTING NEW FDA GUIDANCE

TO REDUCE SODIUM INTAKE

BY BRENDA RICHARDSON, MA, RDN, LD, FAND

THE FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION (FDA) issued new guidance on October 13, 2021 for food manufacturers, restaurants, and foodservice operations to voluntarily reduce the amount of salt they add to certain foods. The time frame to reduce sodium is over the next two and a half years, and the hope is to lower the amount of salt that the average American consumes each day from 3,400 milligrams to 3,000.

This new guidance supports efforts from the American Heart Association and the 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans that recommend no more than 2,300 mg of sodium per day. In addition, it's suggested that ideally, individuals with hypertension or prehypertension reduce daily sodium intake to 1,500 mg for greater blood pressure reduction. While the FDA goal is still higher than the recommended daily allowance of 2,300 mg per day, the FDA estimates this will help lower rates of hypertension, a leading cause of heart disease and stroke in the U.S.

As healthcare providers, we need to embrace the new sodium goals and support our clients with healthy options to improve their health. This article will address the new FDA guidance, the overall role of sodium, food sources, and ways to promote healthy options.

NEW FDA GUIDANCE

The October 2021 guidance from the FDA's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition provides food manufacturers, restaurants, and foodservice operations with short-term goals (2.5 years). The FDA guidelines include goals to reduce sodium concentrations in various food categories, rather than in specific products.

Interestingly, the majority (70 percent) of the sodium in Americans' diets comes from packaged or restaurant foods. With average sodium intake in the U.S. over 3,400 mg/

day, there is considerable work to do to reduce intake to the recommended limit of 2,300 mg/day to decrease the risk of hypertension and cardiovascular disease.

Thus, the overall goal of the FDA guidance is to support reduction of average sodium intake to 3,000 mg/day as the FDA continues exploring ways to reduce sodium. Federal regulators point to studies which show that lowering sodium intake to 2,200 mg a day would result in "tens of thousands fewer cases of heart disease and stroke each year, as well as billions of dollars in health care savings over time." The FDA also notes that similar voluntary initiatives have been successful in other countries, including the United Kingdom, where average sodium intake declined from 3,800 to 3,240 milligrams per day between 2003 and 2011, a change that was accompanied by decreases in blood pressure.

Sodium is already in the processed and restaurant foods when purchased, which makes it difficult to reduce the sodium content. Although it is wise to limit use of added table salt in food preparation and at the table, only a small amount of the daily sodium consumed comes from the salt shaker.

THE ROLE OF SODIUM IN FOOD AND DIETARY FOOD SOURCES

Sodium is an electrolyte that helps the body maintain fluid and blood volume so it can function normally. While the words "salt" and "sodium" are often used interchangeably, they do not mean the same thing. Salt (also known by its chemical name, sodium chloride) is a crystal-like compound common in nature. Sodium is a mineral, and one of the chemical elements found in salt.

Sodium becomes a health risk when consuming too much, as this can raise blood pressure.



Sodium has many uses in our foods, such as:

- Enhancing flavor
 - Adding a salty taste
 - Boosting flavor balance and enhancing the sweetness of sugary items
 - Masking “off notes,” such as bitterness and strange tastes, which can result from food processing
 - Making some types of processed foods more palatable
- Preserving freshness—increases shelf life
- Helping prevent growth of bacteria and other disease-causing agents
- Helping to improve texture and appearance, making the product seem thicker or fuller



THE OVERALL GOAL OF THE FDA GUIDANCE

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- Enhancing color and hue
- Helping retain moisture in processed meat products as a trade-off for saturated fat
- Stabilizing texture, allowing bread to rise and cheese to stick together
- Preventing unwanted chemical changes to other ingredients in many baked items

Knowing that our bodies require only a small amount of sodium each day to function normally, food manufacturers are looking at ways to provide products with lower levels than are currently being used. In the U.S., similar products can vary greatly in sodium content across—and even within—brands.

Although some food manufacturers express concern about the altered taste of lower sodium products, salt is an acquired taste. Research indicates that consumers and their taste buds

can adapt to the taste of lower sodium foods. Some studies found that when a reduced-sodium version of a popular food is served, the typical consumer adds less than 20 percent of the removed sodium back. This behavior suggests that individuals are relatively comfortable with gradual reductions of sodium in products.

More than 40 percent of the sodium we eat each day comes from just 10 types of foods, ranging from the number one source—breads and rolls—to eggs and omelets, which are 10th on the list. Many people are surprised to learn which foods are on the list because the items do not always taste salty.

Top Sources of Sodium

1. Breads and rolls
2. Pizza
3. Sandwiches
4. Cold cuts and cured meats
5. Soups
6. Burritos and tacos
7. Savory snacks (Chips, popcorn, pretzels, snack mixes, and crackers)
8. Chicken
9. Cheese
10. Eggs and omelets

Knowing which types of foods are the biggest contributors to sodium is a key step in reducing daily intake to a healthy level. To determine the amount of sodium in a food, check the Nutrition Facts label, which lists sodium content in milligrams (mg) per serving.

Different brands of the same foods may have different sodium levels. For example, sodium in chicken noodle soup can vary by as much as 840 mg per serving. Check with the food distributor or food vendor to obtain nutritional information on sodium.

Remember that foods that otherwise seem healthy may have high levels of sodium. Examples include cottage cheese and turkey breast deli meat. Raw chicken and pork can be injected with a sodium (or saline) solution which increases sodium content significantly.

TIPS FOR REDUCING SODIUM

Some tips to reduce sodium when purchasing foods or in food preparation include:

- Buy fresh, frozen, or canned vegetables with no salt or sauce added.
- Choose packaged foods labeled “low sodium,” “reduced sodium,” or “no salt added” when available.
- Read food labels/nutritional analysis information and compare the amount of sodium in different products, then choose the options with the lowest amounts of sodium.
- If buying prepared meals, look for those with less than 600 mg of sodium per meal, which is the upper limit set by the FDA for a meal or main dish to be labeled “healthy.”
- Check the amount of sodium per serving and remember to check the number of servings per container.
- When possible, purchase poultry, fish, pork, and lean meat that have not been cured, salted, or smoked. For fresh items, check to see whether saline or salt solution has been added. If so, choose another brand.
- When cooking, use alternatives to replace or reduce the amount of

KNOWING WHICH TYPES OF FOODS

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salt you use, such as garlic, citrus juice, salt-free seasonings, or spices.

- Offer more fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Limit sauces, mixes, and “instant” products in food preparation, including flavored rice and ready-made pasta.
- Offer a heart-healthy diet plan such as the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) Plan. Heart healthy diets need to be simple, lower in sodium, cholesterol, and saturated and total fats. Focus on increased fruits and vegetables, fiber, potassium, and low-fat dairy products.

RESOURCES FOR CLIENTS AND TRAINING

There are many credible evidence-based resources to use with clients and in training on sodium and sodium reduction to include:

HOW DOES YOUR SANDWICH STACK UP ON SODIUM?

2 slices of bread = 400 mg

1 tsp. mustard = 120 mg

1 leaf of lettuce = 2 mg

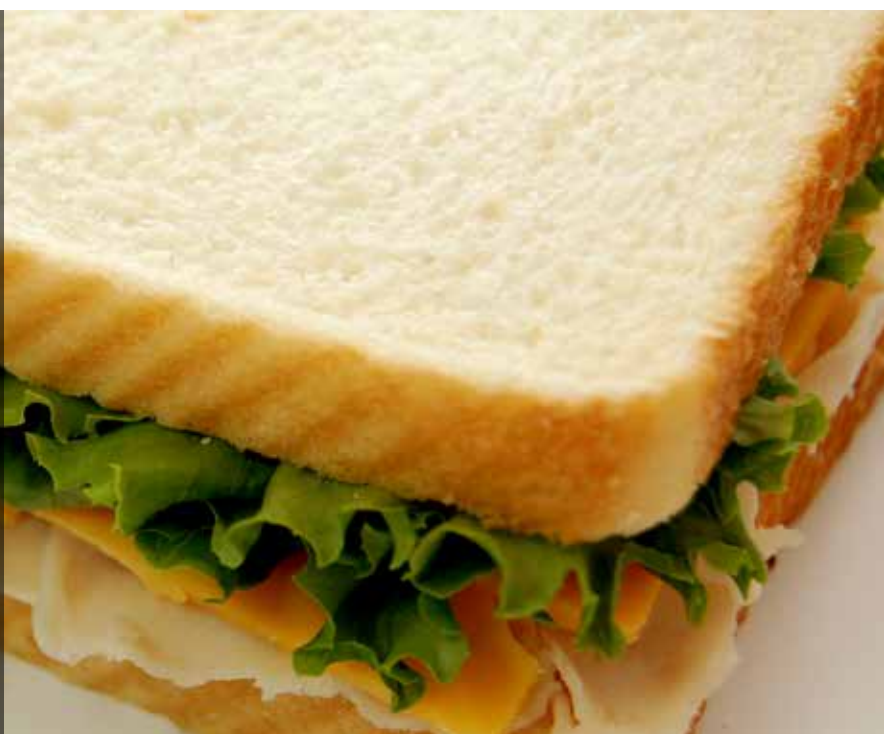
1 slice of cheese = 310 mg

6 thin slices of turkey = 690 mg

TOTAL

1,522 mg

Source: <https://www.cdc.gov>



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)—Sodium Reduction Tools and Training for Health Professionals, https://www.cdc.gov/salt/health_professional_resources.htm

- Fact Sheets, https://www.cdc.gov/salt/fact_sheets.htm
- Sodium Infographics, https://www.cdc.gov/salt/sodium_infographics.htm
- Sodium Q&A: Resource for health care professionals to guide how much sodium patients should consume and ways to reduce their intake and to learn about the status of sodium reduction on a national and international scale, https://www.cdc.gov/dhdsp/docs/Professional_Sodium_QandA-508.pdf


American Heart Association—Topic of Sodium, <https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-eating/eat-smart/sodium>

- Resources: 7 Salty Sodium Myths Busted, 75% of Americans Want Less Sodium in Processed and Restaurant Foods, Cut Back on Salt Without the Cravings, Effects of Excess Sodium, Hold the Salt, How Much Sodium Should I Eat Per Day?, How to Reduce Sodium, How to Track Your Sodium, Sea Salt vs. Table Salt, Sodium and Kids, Get the Scoop on Sodium and Salt, Sodium Can be Sneaky, Sodium Myths and Facts for Kids, Sodium Sources: Where Does All That Sodium Come From?, Sodium Swap: Change Your Salty Ways in 21 Days

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

It's important that healthcare providers embrace the FDA's new guidance for restaurants and food manufacturers to voluntarily reduce the amount of salt they add to foods. Implementation of purchasing systems with food specifications outlining sodium content supports the guidance and encourages manufacturers to offer quality, tasty food with reduced sodium.

The guidance is part of the effort, along with the American Heart Association and the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, which recommends no more than 2,300 mg of sodium per day. In addition, it's suggested that people with hypertension or prehypertension reduce daily intake to 1,500 mg of sodium for greater blood pressure control.

As foodservice professionals, we need to support the new sodium goals and provide our clients with healthy options to improve their overall well-being. Increasing access to lower sodium food options could help prevent millions of cases of high blood pressure and save billions of healthcare dollars. 



REFERENCES

Scan QR code to view the list of resources for this article.



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This **Level II** article assumes that the reader has a thorough knowledge of the topic. The desired outcome is to facilitate application of knowledge into practice by drawing connections among ideas and using information in new situations.

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1. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued new guidance on October 13, 2021 for food manufacturers, restaurants, and foodservice operations to voluntarily reduce the amount of _____ they add to foods.
A. Sugar
B. Gluten
C. Salt
2. In the United States, what percent of the sodium in Americans' diets comes from packaged or restaurant foods?
A. 50
B. 60
C. 70
3. In the United States, the average sodium intake is over _____ mg/day, compared to the recommended limit of 2,300 mg/day to reduce the risk of hypertension and cardiovascular disease.
A. 2,800
B. 3,400
C. 3,800
4. Sodium is a _____, and one of the chemical elements found in salt. (Salt is also known by its chemical name, sodium chloride.)
A. Vitamin
B. Probiotic
C. Mineral
5. Sodium has many uses in our foods, such as:
A. Stabilizing texture, enhancing flavor, adding a salty taste, boosting flavor balance, enhancing sweetness of sugary items
B. Preserving freshness, increasing shelf life, helping prevent growth of disease-causing agents, helping improve texture and appearance
C. Both A and B
6. More than 40 percent of the sodium we eat each day comes from just 10 types of foods, with the top three foods to include _____, pizza, and sandwiches.
A. Breads/rolls
B. Fresh broccoli
C. Cheese
7. Implementation of _____ systems/processes that include food specifications outlining sodium content supports the FDA guidance and encourages manufacturers in offering quality tasty food with reduced sodium.
A. Sanitation
B. Purchasing
C. Clinical



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