

In addition to National Nutrition Month, March also brings National Salt Awareness Week! Today, Americans have no problems getting enough salt in our diets. In fact, consuming too much salt is usually the issue. It is true that our bodies need sodium for things such as proper muscle function. However, too much sodium in our diets causes serious health issues such as high blood pressure.

Most adults and children should aim for sodium intake less than 2,300 milligrams a day. This is only about one teaspoon of salt! Adults age 51 and older, African Americans of any age, and individuals with high blood pressure, diabetes, or chronic kidney disease should further reduce their sodium intake to 1,500 milligrams a day. Reducing sodium is a difficult task because it is commonly used as a preservative in many foods. www.choosemyplate.gov offers some great tips for cutting back on sodium.

- Cut back on processed foods. Canned foods, ready-to-eat meals, cured meats (lunchmeats, sausage and bacon) and cheesy foods are loaded with sodium. Try replacing these with fresh foods.
- Fruits and vegetables are naturally low in sodium. Adding plenty of these to each meal will fill you up without adding much sodium.
- Cooking your own meals at home allows you to control what is in the food your family is eating, including the amount of salt.
- Cutting back on salt little by little will help your taste buds adjust to your new low sodium diet. Eventually, you won't miss the salty taste at all.
- Take the time to look at food labels. Look for foods that are labeled "low sodium", "reduced sodium", or "no salt added."
- Watch the condiments you add to foods. Items such as ketchup, soy sauce, dressings, pickles and seasoning packets are high in sodium. Try to limit these as much as possible or choose low sodium versions.