

CUT THE SODIUM, KEEP THE FLAVOR

Introduction

This lesson introduces an older adult audience to ideas for reducing their risk of heart disease and high blood pressure by limiting their sodium intake. Some audiences may be most interested in strategies to limit daily sodium intake, while others may want to learn more about alternative seasoning options.

Preparation

1. Review the topic.

- Start with the key concepts and discussion guide. The discussion guide provides suggested questions to draw out participants' existing knowledge as well as information you can offer in response to each question.
- Consider your participant demographics and potential interests, and conduct any additional research that may be necessary to prepare for specific questions or improve your own understanding of key concepts (see "Program Guide" for suggested resources).

2. Plan your lesson structure.

- Determine whether time and resources allow for a food-based activity or whether you will use an alternate activity. This lesson includes one alternate activity, and additional activity suggestions are available in the "Program Guide."
- See "Exercise for Health" lesson for ways to incorporate physical activity into the lesson, and plan to ask participants to share their favorite ways to exercise.
- Prepare a rough timeline of your lesson and a plan to integrate discussion with the activity. Depending on available time and participant interests, you can integrate discussion topics into an activity or use discussion time to open or close the lesson.

3. Plan how to administer pre-test (as well as post-test if this is the final session). See "Program Guide" for details.

4. Prepare materials.

- Review the appropriate activity and prepare any necessary materials.
- Choose and print handouts, recipes and pre-tests.

Suggested Recipes

Recipes should either emphasize seasonings other than salt, or provide an alternative to common high-sodium foods (processed meats, chips, store-bought pizza/soups/pasta dishes, etc.)

- Sautéed Garlic Broccoli
- Easy Homemade Nachos

Suggested Handouts

- "Cut the Sodium!"

Key Concepts

Eating too much sodium can lead to high blood pressure, heart disease and even osteoporosis (as high salt intake can lead to calcium loss through urine). Older adults can reduce their risk of developing these conditions by limiting consumption of processed foods, substituting other seasonings for salt and including physical activity in their regular routines.



Discussion Guide

Primary Questions

How common do you think high blood pressure is?

- The Centers for Disease Control says that one in three Americans has high blood pressure.

Does anyone know someone with high blood pressure or heart disease? What changes can you make to reduce your risk for high blood pressure and heart disease?

- Reducing sodium in your diet is an important step. The sodium in salt (and many other foods) causes the body to hold excess fluid, which increases pressure on your heart as it pushes blood through your blood vessels. A higher amount of fluid increases the volume of blood your heart has to pump, which makes it work harder and also stresses your blood vessels and kidneys.
- Increasing the amount of physical activity you engage in is an important complement to reducing your sodium intake, and can also affect blood pressure. *What are some of your favorite ways to exercise?*

How much sodium do you think the average American consumes in a day? How much is recommended?

- The average American consumes 3400 mg of sodium a day, but the national Institute of Medicine recommends that adults over 51 should not consume more than 1500 mg of salt a day (about 3/4 teaspoon); the recommended daily sodium intake for adults 51-70 is 1300 mg, and for adults over 70 it is 1200 mg (about 2/3 teaspoon).

Where does most of the sodium in our diets come from? How can you reduce the sodium in your diet?

- Most (75-80%) of our sodium intake comes from processed foods. An important strategy for limiting your sodium intake is to look for foods with no more than 200-300 mg of sodium per serving, and generally try to consume less processed/pre-prepared food. Cooking foods from scratch is the easiest way to control the amount of sodium you eat.
- The top sources of sodium in the average American diet are bread products, cold cuts, pizza, poultry (often injected with a sodium solution), soups and sandwiches. Review handout for other tips for reducing sodium intake.

Secondary Questions

Claims about salt on food packaging can be misleading. What kinds of claims do you see about salt or sodium?

- Labels like “reduced sodium” or “light in sodium” can be misleading because they refer to the amount of sodium in this product compared to another product. “Very low sodium” and “low sodium” refer to the actual amount of sodium per serving—35 mg and 140 mg, respectively.

What are some ways to make food taste good without adding salt?

- Try cooking with new spices and vinegars, or try a completely new fruit or vegetable. Varying textures can help as well. If you reduce the amount of salt you eat slowly over time, your taste buds will adapt so that you enjoy the same taste with a smaller amount of salt.
- Many people start to lose some of their sense of taste and smell as they age, which can lead to using more salt than usual without noticing. People who experience this should check with their doctor to make sure that other factors like nasal and sinus problems, medications, dental hygiene, and diseases aren't affecting their sense of taste and smell.

Suggested Activities

If you have access to basic ingredients and supplies, we recommend planning the lesson around a cooking demonstration or activity that will show participants concrete skills that apply the lesson concepts. If limited resources or time make a food-based activity impossible, use the alternate activity or any of the other suggested activities in the “Program Guide.”

A. Food-Based Activity: Well-Seasoned Snacks

Suggest healthy alternatives to high-sodium snacks that also introduce participants to alternative seasonings. If you have access to a stove or hot plates on site or can pop popcorn before class, show participants how to make and flavor their own popcorn.

Or for an easy no-cook alternative, mix herbs and spices into yogurt for a fresh vegetable dip.

Discussion points to address while preparing food (see discussion guide as well):

- What snacks do you like to eat? Remember that 75-80% of the sodium we consume is from processed foods—often snacks. Can anyone think of snacks they like that use whole foods like fruit, vegetables, nuts or yogurt? Popcorn is actually a whole grain that can be a healthy snack if it's made without too much added fat or salt.
- What are some seasonings that you like to use in your cooking? Would some of those taste good on popcorn?
- Did anyone try a new seasoning? What other foods could you use it with?

Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mixing bowl(s): one for demo, or one per group • Mixing spoon(s): one for demo, or one per group • Sample dishes and spoons for each participant • Optional: cutting boards and knives for participants
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start by deciding whether the activity will be a demonstration or will involve participation. If participants will be preparing food themselves, decide whether they will work alone or in groups. • Review “Program Guide” for tips on leading a cooking demo or guiding participants through a recipe. • Review ingredients and make substitutions as necessary. • Modify recipe as necessary, and print copies for participants to take home. • Pop popcorn ahead of time if necessary, or cut vegetables for dipping unless you have space and equipment to let participants cut vegetables themselves.
Ingredients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole corn kernels for popping • Variety of seasonings: paprika/chili powder, dry basil and/or oregano, parmesan cheese, curry powder, or cinnamon • Plain nonfat or low-fat yogurt • Assorted raw vegetables (carrots, peppers, celery, broccoli) • Variety of seasonings: paprika/chili powder, dry basil and/or oregano, curry powder, cumin, ginger, cinnamon, turmeric, or dill/parsley
Directions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mix seasonings with popcorn or yogurt, or invite participants to mix their own samples. • For yogurt dip, invite participants to cut vegetables and/or use vegetables to taste different dips.

B. Alternate Activity: Guess the Sodium

Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poster or list with packaged foods (and images if possible) and sodium content, or actual food items (try to include some that have a surprising amount of salt, such as breads, cakes and sandwiches).
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the amount of salt in each food and cover the sodium content with a sticky note to hide the information during discussion.
Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask participants to guess how much sodium is in each food item, or to rank foods from least to most sodium. If some foods have sodium claims, such as “reduced sodium” or “low-sodium,” consider pointing out these claims and asking participants what they think that means about the food’s sodium content. • Either reveal the sodium amounts on the poster or ask volunteers to read the actual sodium content for each item. • This can also be an opportunity to discuss the actual amount of salt in each food (for some items like snacks that are typically eaten in one sitting) vs. the amount of salt in a “serving” as listed on the label.

Savory Snacks

Add new flavors to popcorn for an easy and delicious whole-grain snack, or try mixing herbs and spices with yogurt to make a tasty dip for cut vegetables.

INGREDIENTS

For seasoned popcorn:

- Whole corn kernels for popping
- Oil (olive, vegetable, sunflower)
- Choose from a variety of seasonings:
 - * Paprika/chili powder
 - * Dry basil and/or oregano
 - * Parmesan cheese
 - * Curry powder
 - * Cinnamon

For yogurt dip:

- Plain nonfat or low-fat yogurt
- Assorted raw vegetables (carrots, peppers, celery, broccoli)
- Choose from a variety of seasonings:
 - Paprika and/or chili powder
 - Dry basil and/or oregano
 - Curry powder, cumin, ginger, and/or turmeric
 - Cinnamon
 - Dill and/or parsley

DIRECTIONS

For popcorn:

1. Heat a pan with tall sides and a lid (saucepan).
2. Coat the bottom of the pan with oil.
3. Add whole corn kernels and cover pot with lid.
4. Once kernels begin popping, shake pan slightly to bring unpopped kernels to the bottom of the pan.
5. Turn off heat once corn stops popping.
6. Mix seasonings with popcorn (start with a little and add more to taste).

For yogurt dip:

1. Mix seasonings with yogurt (start with a little and add more to taste).
2. Cut raw vegetables for dipping.