

Four Simple Steps to a Low-sodium Lifestyle

(ARA) - Implementing a low-sodium diet is a challenge because sodium is everywhere. The typical American eats a high number of processed foods such as frozen dinners, boxed noodle and rice dishes, canned soups and canned vegetables, all of which are very high in sodium. So, even if you do not add salt while cooking or use a salt shaker at the table, you are probably eating too much.

Sodium is the word used on labels for packaged and processed foods and it is the main ingredient in salt. The total daily intake of sodium is that which is known to be in food items plus the extra salt that one uses in cooking or seasoning food.

If you have recently suffered a heart attack and been told you have heart failure, it's likely your doctor advised you to cut back on your sodium intake because heart failure causes the body to hold on to extra sodium, which in turn causes extra fluid to build up in your body. The extra fluid makes your heart work harder, which is not a good thing for a muscle already under strain.

A low-sodium diet includes no more than 2,000 to 3,000 milligrams (mg) of sodium per day. That is the same as two to three grams of sodium a day. To give you an idea of how much that is: one teaspoon of salt equals approximately 2,300 mg of sodium.

What can you do to cut back on the sodium? Here are four tips from the Heart Failure Society of America, a nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing quality and the duration of life for patients with heart failure and preventing the condition in those at risk:

1. STOP ADDING SALT TO YOUR FOOD.

By simply taking the salt shaker off the table, and stopping the practice of adding salt to food when cooking, you can cut your sodium intake by as much as 30 percent. Foods with less sodium can still be considered tasty. There are a lot of seasoning options available to spice things up. These include black, cayenne and lemon pepper; fresh herbs like garlic, onion powder, dill, parsley and rosemary; lemon juice; and flavored extracts like vanilla, almond, etc.

2. ADAPT PREFERRED FOODS TO LOW-SODIUM VERSIONS.

There are low-sodium substitutes for many of the foods you like. For example, instead of preparing a country ham, you can cook a fresh lean pork roast. Instead of buying lunch meats, which typically contain high amounts of sodium, you can cook fresh chicken, turkey, roast beef or pork without adding salt and then cut it up for sandwiches the next day. If you like soup, instead of buying the canned version, which is very high in sodium and preservatives, you can cut up fresh vegetables and put them in a slow cooker and use herbs and spices for seasoning.

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Many types of canned vegetables that you enjoy are also available in low-sodium versions. Just look for labels that say sodium-free, no-salt, low-sodium, reduced-sodium or unsalted.

3. PICK FOODS NATURALLY LOW IN SODIUM.

Generally, you can eat as much fresh food as you want without counting the sodium content. Fresh fruits and vegetables, including freshly squeezed fruit and vegetable juices, have very little sodium. The same is true for fresh meat, poultry and fish.

If you are not eating fresh foods, choose other low-sodium foods as much as possible, such as canned fruits, plain frozen vegetables and dried beans, peas, rice and lentils.

4. LEARN TO READ FOOD LABELS.

By reading food labels, you can learn which foods are high and low in sodium. As a rule, most processed foods, whether they are frozen, canned or boxed, are high in sodium, but don't rule them out entirely. Some packaged foods are available in low- or no-salt versions.

It can be difficult to change your eating habits, but try implementing changes slowly instead of all at once. It may take weeks before you enjoy the taste of low-sodium foods, but your taste buds will adjust. Eventually you might not even miss the salt.

To learn more about heart failure and how to manage your condition, log on to the Heart Failure Society of America's Web site: www.aboutHF.org.

Courtesy of ARAcontent