Are You Eating Too Much Salt?

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The most recent Dietary Guidelines recommend only 1,500 milligrams of sodium per day for persons who are 51 and older, and those of any age who are African American or have hypertension, diabetes or chronic kidney disease. The recommendation is made because these groups of people tend to be more responsive to the blood pressure raising effects of sodium.

Research has found that as sodium is decreased, blood pressure is reduced as well. High blood pressure can contribute to the risk of developing cardiovascular disease, congestive heart failure and kidney disease.

We consume sodium as a part of table salt which is made of sodium and chloride. Salt serves many purposes; it is used in curing meat, enhancing the flavor of food, and maintaining the moisture content of food. Salt does play an important role in body functions. If your sodium gets depleted in the body all contraction of muscles, including the heart, would stop. Salt helps maintain electrolyte and fluid balances in the body and helps our brain and nerves to communicate and function properly. It only takes a small amount of salt to perform these functions.

One of the best ways to reduce sodium is to read food labels. Food labels list how much sodium each serving of the food contains. Eat lots of fresh fruits and vegetables; they have minimal sodium. Prepare your own food. It allows you to control the amount of salt that goes in to it. Another thing you can do is ask that salt not be added to your food when you eat out.

Use The Food Label As A Sodium-lowering Tool

To help consume less than 2,400 milligrams of sodium per day, it is important to know what the language regarding sodium on the food label means. If the label states that the product is “sodium” or “salt free”, it means that there are less than five milligrams of sodium per serving in the product. If the label states “very low sodium”, it means there is 35 milligrams or less of sodium per serving. “Low sodium” means there is less than 140 milligrams of sodium per serving in the product. If the label states it has “reduced” or “less” sodium, it means the product has at least 25% less than the traditional food. “Light in sodium” means there is 50% less than a standard serving of the traditional food.

The Creative Living Newsletter is a partnership among the Guadalupe Center, the Kansas Department on Aging, and University of Missouri Extension. If you have any suggestions for its content, please contact Nina Chen, Ph.D., Human Development Specialist, 816-252-5051.

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