

# TO YOUR HEALTH

Carleton-Willard Village Out-Patient Clinic

100 Old Billerica Road, Bedford

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## Shaking the Sodium Habit

By Cherie M. Asgeirsson, RD, LDN

You have been told all your life that too much sodium is bad for you and it can raise your blood pressure. Indeed, the connection between a high sodium intake and increased blood pressure or hypertension has been established. However, there is controversy about just how low your sodium intake should go. Sorting through information on sodium is challenging and sometimes the basics can be confusing too. So, let's start with the facts on sodium.



Sodium is an essential mineral, meaning your body doesn't make it naturally so you must meet your needs with food. Sodium is critical to allowing muscles and nerves to work properly. Sodium also regulates the fragile balance of fluids in your body, which assists in maintaining the right blood volume and blood pressure. When you eat extra sodium, it pulls fluid into your blood veins, increasing the amount of blood in your veins. With more blood flowing through your vessels your blood pressure increases. It is like turning up the water in the garden hose. The pressure in the hose goes up as more water is rushing through. After awhile, high blood pressure may damage or overstretch the blood vessel walls and accelerate the build-up of plaque that can stop blood flow. High blood pressure stresses the heart by forcing it to work harder to pump blood through the body.

High blood pressure is known as the "silent killer" because symptoms are not always obvious. It is the leading risk factor of women's deaths in the U.S. and the second leading risk

factor for death in men. As we age we are likely to develop high blood pressure. In fact, 90% of American adults are expected to develop high blood pressure over their lifetimes. If you currently do not have high blood pressure, eating less sodium can help to mediate the age-related rise in blood pressure, reducing your risk of heart attack, heart failure and stroke.



Most sodium does not come from salt! Often these words salt and sodium are used interchangeably, but they are not the same. Sodium is a mineral, which occurs naturally in some foods; often the sodium content is related to the sodium in the soil the food was grown in! Sodium is added to most processed foods. Sodium is a component of salt. Salt is 40% sodium and 60% chloride. To put it into terms you can relate to, one level teaspoon of salt contains 2,300 mg of sodium.



Approximately 70% of the average American's sodium intake comes from processed foods. If you consult the nutrition labels you can see why. Here are some examples of popular food items and their sodium count:

- 8 ounces of canned soup can contain more than 900 mg
- ¼ cup of bottled salad dressing or a frozen low calorie entrée can contain 700 mg
- One black olive contains 24 mg
- A pickle spear contains 385 mg
- One slice of pizza may have more than 600 mg
- One serving of cold cuts may top out at over 1,000 mg!

Beware of foods that don't seem salty, as they can pack a lot of sodium!

The 2015 U.S. Dietary Guideline and the American Heart Association recommendation for sodium is 2,300 mg for adults 50 years and younger, and 1,500 mg for adults 51 years and older, or those already diagnosed with high blood pressure. The average sodium intake in the U.S. exceeds these levels at 3,400 mg/day. The current debate is how much does one's sodium intake need to go down to see a benefit? A recent review of 34 studies concluded that reducing your intake by 1,000 mg/day is beneficial for the general population. If you are already following a low sodium diet, consult your physician before reducing sodium more.

Our bodies do need a small amount of sodium for the important functions (about 500 mg per day) but it is best to get your sodium from whole foods and salt. By cutting back (or cutting out) processed foods your sodium intake will be slashed considerably. While many fresh, whole foods do contain sodium, it is acceptable to use a pinch of salt sparingly after cooking. Experiment with different non-salt seasonings such as Mrs. Dash, lemon pepper, herbs, onions, garlic, and lemon juice. The bottom line to lowering your sodium intake:

- Eat more fresh vegetables and fruits
- Consume potassium rich foods (examples: leaf greens, tomatoes, potatoes, bananas, oranges, dried fruit, nuts) which can help blunt the effects of sodium on blood pressure
- Use pepper and herbs to season food instead of salt
- Choose unsalted snacks
- Read food labels and choose foods low in sodium



### **Coming Attraction: Wellness Fair**



**Experience a mini massage or  
acupressure session, meet the  
chiropractor, try a Tai-Chi or Yoga class,  
pick up some nutritional information and  
much more.**

**Join us for healthy living tips!**

**Friday, October 7, 2016**

**10:00 am-2:00 pm**

**Auditorium**

### **Clinic Announcement**

We're sorry to announce that our Massage Therapist, Liz Parsons, will be leaving at the end of September. For nine years she has been creating a warm and relaxing atmosphere for many residents of Carleton-Willard Village. We wish her well.



### **Health Education Lecture**

**Is YOUR Medicare Plan Still  
Right for You?**

Arthur Budnik is a SHINE Specialist  
(Serving the Health Insurance  
Needs of Everyone) from  
Minuteman Senior Services.

This presentation will show you how to  
review your options regarding affordability,  
health plan choices and prescription  
coverage.

**Join us Wednesday, September 14th**

**10:30 am—11:30 am**

**Auditorium Center and Left**