

PENNY SAVER NEWS

FAX: 932-5261

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BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY

5339 S. County Road 579

Seffner, FL 33584-3334

PH:(813)744-5519 x 136, FAX:744-5776

e-mail:makeith@ifas.ufl.edu

Lower the Salt Shaker and Step Back!

For anyone interested in protecting their heart from cardiovascular disease, the results of a new, 15 year long study have finally come out. Stay away from processed foods and put that salt shaker down. People who did **not** have high blood pressure but who stuck to a reduced salt diet lowered their risk of heart disease by 30%.

Millions of us with high blood pressure problems have been told to skip the salt for years. Salt, or more precisely sodium, is part of the mineral imbalance that leads to high blood pressure. But there was nothing to show that people without high blood pressure would be helped by avoiding salt. And there was no good evidence that salt did anything directly to the heart or blood vessels.

Now, there is. These people, over 3000 in the study, were between 30 and 54 years old when the study started. They did not have high blood pressure. Half were given instructions 10 years ago. Some received individual counseling, others got group training, for 1 to 4 years. Then every 2 years they were either interviewed by phone or sent a questionnaire by mail. Their medical history was also followed for 10 to 15 years.

The ones who managed to reduce their sodium intake by 25% to 30% and keep it down had 25% to 30% fewer heart attacks, strokes, angioplasties, deaths and other cardiovascular 'events' than those who kept eating more salt. Doctors said the difference was about the same as would have been expected if they had been taking statin drugs. Salt seems to make blood vessels thicker and stiffer, so that they can't

expand and contract with the blood. It seems to make heart muscles thicker and less able to pump effectively. There were also significantly fewer deaths in the low salt group.

So what exactly did these people do to have healthier hearts? They read the labels on food packages. They looked for how much sodium each food contained. They kept track of how much salt they were eating each day. They accustomed themselves to eating food with less salt. They bought more reduced-salt and low-salt food.

These are all things any of us can do. Over 80% of the salt most of us eat comes from processed foods. These include not only lunch meats, cheeses and snack foods but also grain-based foods such as breakfast cereals and breads. Many condiments such as soy sauce, ketchup, mustard and salad dressings are also high salt foods. These all have a Nutrition Facts box on the label. It's easy to take a look at the Sodium line before you throw the box in your shopping cart.

What should you look for? The American Heart Association recommends that everyone try to keep their total sodium for the day below 2,300 mg. That's not quite one full teaspoon of salt a day. If you know you have heart disease or high blood pressure, then your goal should be to get close to 2,000 mg, or better yet 1,500 mg a day.

If you have a hot dog for lunch, that's about 600 mg of sodium. Add a slice of cheese, another 400, a tablespoon each of mustard - 150, and ketchup - 180, put it all in a bun with 240 mg, and your lunch is 1570 mg of sodium, not counting what you choose to drink. A sports drink will add another 100 mg or more. You don't have much left for breakfast or dinner.

Here's a delicious side dish for the fish, chicken, brats or 'dogs you're grilling for the weekend. It depends on fresh fruits, veggies and herbs for its salt-free flavor, and only adds 10 mg of sodium to your plate. If you're allergic to mangos use firm peaches instead. Add enough cayenne and jalapeño peppers to make it as spicy as you like.

Spicy Mango and Avocado Salsa

2 ripe avocados, chopped

2 ripe mangos, chopped

1 small, ripe tomato, chopped

1 small orange bell pepper, chopped

1 small red onion, chopped

1 bunch cilantro, trimmed and minced

Juice of 1 lime

Juice of 2 tangerines or 1 orange

Cayenne pepper (optional)

1 jalapeno pepper, minced (optional)

Combine the fruits and veggies in a glass or plastic bowl and mix gently. Add fruit juices, season to taste with peppers. Mix well, cover and refrigerate for 1 hour. Serves 6 as side dish with grilled fish or chicken.

(Recipe from Simply Florida cookbook, available from our office.)

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