

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Valentine's Day is just past. Hopefully you had a wonderful day with the love of your life. With hearts and flowers all over the place, now's the time to do something else good for your heart - cut back just a little bit more on the salt. The newest healthy eating recommendations are that most of us should be aiming for 1500 mg of sodium a day. That's quite a drop from the 3300 mg or more that an average American eats. But is it possible, eating in America? And is it worth it?

Most of us think of blood pressure when we think of the problems sodium causes. Too much salt does seem to raise the pressure in some people. But for most of us the problem may really be too little of other minerals, specifically calcium, potassium and magnesium. If we ate more of those the salt wouldn't have as much effect. Besides blood pressure though, extra salt is being connected to some cancers, especially of the stomach and intestines. It seems the salt irritates the linings to the point that they react with cancer. So, less salt is probably good. Can it be done?

That's a question that a lot of health professionals are asking. Even in a hospital, where we patients have no control over what we eat, it is hard for the kitchen and staff dietitians to get our meals down to just 1500 mg of sodium a day. How on earth would we manage out in the 'real world'? Unless we are willing to cook completely from scratch, including baking our own bread, we won't reach that level.

We need a little tiny bit of salt. But we love the taste of it a lot more. There are a variety of substitutes that the food industry keeps trying, but none are the same. Some,

such as potassium chloride and magnesium chloride work as well killing bacteria. But they are bitter and to some people taste very metallic. If you see them in an ingredient list, they're replacing some salt.

Other ingredients don't taste salty themselves but make less salt taste more salty. Monosodium glutamate or MSG is probably the best known of these. Some amino acids, the building blocks of protein, do the same thing. They might show up on an ingredient list as glycine, lysine, taurine or arginine alone or as esters. Again, they are unfamiliar ingredients, but there to help us reduce our sodium.

The food industry is also working on finding other ingredients that would give us the same food safety. Salt does a great job of killing or stopping the growth of certain bacteria. Salt also helps yeast grow and controls the stickiness of dough. Without salt it's hard to make good bread or breakfast cereals. Salt certainly improves the flavor and aroma of cooked meats. If you've ever compared a brined turkey to a plain one you've tasted the difference.

There are almost 40 different ingredients that can be used to replace salt in one food or another, with more or less success, but none tastes the same or does all the same things that salt does. So we're still waiting.

In the meantime, there are some simple steps we can do that make a dent in our salt. Choose canned vegetables with NO SALT ADDED on the label. Even some tomatoes, tuna and beans are now coming with less or no salt added. Look for them in the store. Use more herbs and spices, including a squirt of lemon juice, to add flavor.

If you can't find a no salt added brand in your local stores, dig out the colander. Simply rinsing canned vegetables and beans will reduce the sodium by 10% or more. If

you soak canned beans and then rinse them again, you can take almost 50% of the sodium out. The only other nutrient that was lost in substantial amounts by soaking and rinsing was vitamin C, but canned beans are not a good source of that.

So do your heart and stomach a favor and rinse your canned veggies, including beans. This recipe will take only minutes to get on the table for your hungry family if you cook the rice the night before. Don't overheat the cheese or it will get tough. Make the salad while the burritos heat, dinner's on!

Quick and Easy Beans and Rice Burritos

1 small onion	2 cups cooked brown rice (instant is fine)
1 15-oz can pinto beans	8 10-in whole wheat tortillas
1 cup shredded low fat cheddar or Jack cheese	
Garlic powder, chili powder, cumin optional	Salsa, chopped tomato optional

Preheat oven to 350°F. Spray baking pan with cooking spray. Chop onion finely. Drain and rinse beans. Combine rice, onion and beans in small bowl. Add seasonings if desired (1/4 tsp garlic powder, 1/2 tsp cumin, 1 tsp chili powder or more). Lay one tortilla on plate. Put 1/2 cup of bean mixture in center and roll tortilla in burrito shape. Lay with fold side down in baking pan. Repeat with all tortillas. Heat in oven for 10 minutes. Remove from oven, sprinkle with half the shredded cheese, return to oven for 5 minutes. Serve hot with rest of cheese, salsa and other toppings your family enjoys. Serves 4.