

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Does this sound familiar to you? The doctor looks serious and says “Your blood pressure is getting a high. Better skip the salt from now on.” If you or someone in your family has heard something like that from your doctor, you are not alone. Almost one third of all Americans all ready have high blood pressure. Unfortunately, there are a lot more of us who should also be skipping the salt. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention says that anyone over 40 years old is at risk for high blood pressure! That’s an awful lot of us! And the African-American population, even as young as 20 years old, is also at high risk and should be limiting their salt intake. Put all together, it’s almost 3 out of every 4 people in the US. Besides helping to lower blood pressure, less sodium keeps our arteries softer and more able to relax. That’s a big help for a healthy body too.

Do you read food labels, check the percent sodium on the packages? That’s great! Unfortunately, that number won’t help you a whole lot. The %DV on a package label is based on someone who can have 2300 mg of sodium a day. But if you all ready have heart disease, the AHA recommends not more than 2000 mg. And the CDC says that most of us, to avoid getting heart disease, should be limiting ourselves to just 1500 mg a day. So we need to read the mg of sodium, not the %, to decide if we should buy that package or not.

But, as anyone who has tried knows, it’s a lot easier to say than actually do. For

one thing, we've been trained since childhood to prefer the taste of salty foods. Luckily, this is something we can train ourselves out of too. If we try to go 'cold turkey' on the salt we, and the people around us probably, will be miserable. Everything will taste flat, blah. On the other hand, if we cut back gradually, just a little less each time, skip one salty condiment, use a reduced sodium food as part of a meal, we really can retrain our taste buds to be completely happy with less.

The bigger problem is that so many foods - grocery store, restaurant, and fast foods - have huge amounts of sodium. There are fast food and restaurant meals that have almost twice the daily allowance in one meal! Oh, my aching heart! But we all 'know' that fast food is not good. True, there are lots of bad choices in fast food eateries. But there are some better ones available if you look. Ask for their nutrition information, and choose what your heart can stand.

There are a lot of very salty foods in the grocery store too. In fact, most of us probably get more salt from foods we don't expect to be salty. Some sneaky salt foods include: a lot of condiments- the ketchup, mustard, mayo, salad dressings and even margarine; many baked goods - crackers and cookies; seasoned meats - the preflavored pork and chicken products; many frozen dinners and vegetables with sauces; and cold cuts, hot dogs, bacon and ham.

Yes, it might take a little longer to cook a chicken breast yourself using a salt-free seasoning mix. But when you consider that your chicken will have only 55 mg of sodium, compared to as much as 1030 mg in some of the seasoned, ready-to-cook packages, you can see the benefits. How many fewer trips to the doctor might you be able to make if you prepared your own?

To keep the sodium down in your diet, choose NO SALT ADDED canned and frozen vegetables. Drain and rinse regular canned vegetables. Get plain meats, then prepare them using sodium free or reduced sodium seasoning and marinades. Make your own low-salt and high seasoning tomato sauce and gravies. Hide the salt shaker! Read food labels and choose sensibly. Eat for a healthy heart!

Here's an easy seasoned rice with only 24 mg of sodium, to compare with some commercial brands with over 800 mg per serving. You can serve with meat or veggies.

Self-Seasoned Rice

2 Tbsp olive or canola oil	1 medium onion, finely chopped
3/4 C uncooked long grain rice	1 1/2 C low sodium chicken broth
1/4 tsp celery flakes	1/4 tsp onion powder
1/4 tsp dill weed	1/8 tsp freshly ground black pepper

Heat oil in nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add onion and rice. Cook and stir until lightly browned. Add remaining ingredients, bring to boil and cover. Reduce heat and simmer 15 to 25 minutes until rice is tender. Serve hot. Serves 4.