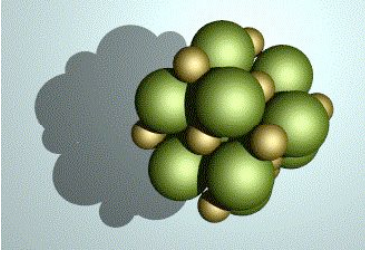


WHAT IS SALT?

Table salt is sodium chloride (NaCl) and contains 40% sodium by weight. Sodium is an important mineral used by the body for maintaining fluid balance, contraction of muscles



and helping to conduct nerve impulses. To maintain the water balance of our body's sodium is removed through the kidneys. One teaspoon of salt contains 2,100 milligrams of sodium. The current recommendation is to consume less than 2,400 milligrams (mg) of sodium a day. This includes ALL salt and sodium consumed, including that used in cooking and at the table. For some people, especially those

who are sodium-sensitive or who have high blood pressure, sodium may increase their blood pressure. Having a high blood pressure can increase a person's risk of stroke, heart attack and kidney failure.

The amount of salt that we eat has a direct effect on our blood pressure. The more salt we eat, the higher our blood pressure. This is true, not only in people with high blood pressure, but also in people with normal blood pressure. A high salt intake also causes other health damage such as greater retention of water in your body, which leads to swelling of the ankles. Too much salt also worsens thinning of the bones (osteoporosis), asthma and kidney disease and is closely related to cancer of the stomach. Therefore, everyone should cut the amount of salt they eat.

Sodium also comes from a many other items you may not realize. Baking soda, some seasonings, antacids, and condiments can contain large amounts of sodium. Some prescribed medicines and over-the-counter remedies also contain salt. Be sure and read all food and medication labels before your purchase to help you make low sodium choices.

HYPERTENSION (HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE) & CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE:

Heart disease has become the primary cause of death of American Indians and Alaska Natives. It is also a leading cause of illness and hospitalization. The sources of this sickness are also connected to other health and lifestyle issues of Native people such as diabetes, high blood pressure, being overweight, commercial tobacco use, limited exercise and high blood cholesterol levels. Taking care of your heart has become a major effort of many Tribes and the Indian Health Service.

Native Americans, especially those who develop nephropathy from diabetes, are also at particular risk of hypertension. Treatment for high blood pressure is not only taking medicines and controlling salt intake. Lifestyle and dietary habits also play an important role.



The major types of heart disease are atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries), enlarged heart, infection of the heart muscle, angina and irregular heart-beats. Heart disease can

arise from genetic defects, infection, narrowing of the coronary arteries, high blood pressure, lack of exercise or poor eating habits including high levels of salt in the diet. According to US Government studies Native Americans above 18 years of age are more likely to have one or more heart disease risk factors such as hypertension, cigarette smoking, high blood cholesterol, obesity or diabetes.

There are many ways to help avoid heart disease and the many associated health risks. Healthy eating and increased exercise are two ways to keep your heart healthy. You can also stop smoking cigarettes, lose weight, reduce the amount of alcohol you drink, find ways to remove stress from your life (or reduce it), get more aerobic exercise and increase your dietary potassium and calcium.

Strangely enough drinking more water avoids water retention. Just as high salt intake causes you to retain water, low water intake causes your body to retain salt, and around it goes. While not seeming logical it is true that drinking more water is one of the best ways to get rid of excess water out of your. The extra water you drink will wind up in the toilet, not in your body, and will wash out all that extra sodium with it.

When in flushing mode, drink as much as one ounce of water per pound of body weight daily, which is about twice what you normally need to consume. Keep in mind that tap water generally contains a small measure of sodium (the amount varies per region), and distilled water contains none.

A heart-healthy diet is a high in vitamin C, low in salt, cholesterol, and fat. Foods that best meet these requirements are whole grains, fruits, and vegetables. A diet high in sodium, fat and cholesterol is associated with higher blood pressure, increased weight, and elevated blood cholesterol levels, all of which increase the chances that atherosclerosis will occur. There are several things you can do on a daily basis to reduce this risks including changes in diet and getting regular exercise. Your heart is a muscle that needs exercise just like the rest of your muscles. And the stronger your heart, the less work it may have to do to pump blood through your body



HERE ARE TIPS FOR MAKING HEART HEALTHY CHOICES:

- Eat more wild fish, poultry, deer, and other foods from your tribe.
- When choosing beef or pork buy lean cuts and trim the fat off of meat before cooking.
- Take the fatty skin off of chicken and turkey.
- Remove as much fat as possible from canned meat, and other processed foods.
- Include whole grains in your diet like brown rice, corn, oats, whole wheat and beans.
- Try your salads and sandwiches with little or no dressing or lite varieties.
- Eat fruits and vegetables especially leafy greens at least 5 servings a day. Add more Cruciferous vegetables into your diet. They are members of the cabbage family and should be a regular part of just about everyone's diet. Cruciferous veggies include kale

and turnip greens, cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, and kohlrabi. Scientists have found strong evidence that this family of vegetables may actually be a powerful preventive to cancer.

- Bake, boil, broil, steam, or roast! Fry foods less often. Use small amounts of canola or olive oil instead of butter, lard or shortening.
- Experiment with veggies, herbs and spices and lime juice to flavor your meals.

HERBAL ALTERNATIVES TO SALT

Sodium is an essential mineral, for maintaining good water and electrolyte balance in the body and we do need to have some every day. There is enough natural sodium in vegetables, that most people can get enough without adding any extra salt to their food. Regrettably, only 5% of the sodium intake of Americans comes from the natural ingredients in food. Packaged foods total 45 percent of our sodium intake, 45 percent is used in cooking, and another 5 percent is in add-ons like ketchup, mustard, relish, and salad dressings.

If your Doctor has suggested you decrease the amount of sodium in your diet you aren't alone. Many Americans are becoming sodium conscious. In the 2000 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, the U.S. Departments of Agriculture (USDA) and Health and Human Services recommend that we choose and prepare foods with less salt. Most of us, especially those eating the typical western diet, love salt! We eat way too much salt in packaged and processed foods. People have grown so used to the salty flavor of foods that we add it to just about everything, even fruits and vegetables, at the table. For a few people, too much salt has little health risks. But for others excessive dietary sodium and low intake of potassium, is a common cause of high blood pressure, known as the "silent killer", especially in salt-sensitive individuals.



As you start to prepare enjoy new types of foods and live a healthier life, you will naturally decrease the amount of salt you use. Instead of table salt and other seasonings that contain sodium or monosodium glutamate (MSG), you can use different types of herbs that will add great taste, freshness, and spice to your food. As you learn to replace salt with other cooking methods you will experience the full flavor of the food itself.

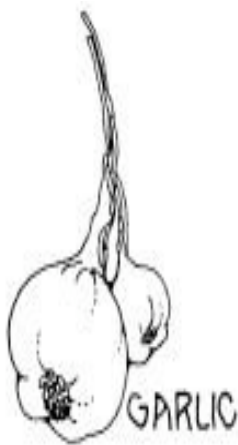
Increasing the amount of herbs you use in cooking provides a double benefit. By using more natural ingredients such as aromatic plants and spices you will not only cut your sodium intake, but scientists have found strong health advantages of herbs. Recent studies by researchers at the U.S. Department of Agriculture reveal that common herbs are loaded with antioxidants. Antioxidants are important for good health because they can help reduce cell damage caused by corrosive molecules, called free-radicals from exterior sources including pesticides, smoking and exhaust fumes. Free radicals have been seen as main causes in the development of practically all chronic and aging-related diseases. Not

only was the antioxidant activity of some herbs studied higher than that reported for vitamin E, these herbs even surpassed foods well-known for their antioxidant content such as vegetables, berries and other fruits. Oregano emerged the clear winner. A number of other herbs also pack a significant antioxidant punch. Among the more familiar, ranked in order, are dill, garden thyme, rosemary and peppermint. Less familiar herbs with comparable antioxidant-power include rose geranium, sweet bay, purple amaranth, winter savory and Vietnamese coriander.



Fortunately, there are lots of alternatives to salt that can make your food tasty and interesting, such as fresh, frozen or dried herbs and spices, garlic, onions, black pepper, lemon, lime, vinegars, spicy peppers and low salt tomato paste. Try different combinations. These seasonings add a different kind of taste dimension to food, providing more flavors to make up for less salt.

Flavor your foods with these herbs and spices instead of salt:



- Basil, parsley, black pepper and Italian herbs is superb in any tomato dish, pasta sauce, meat loaf, poultry or beef
- Pepper, garlic powder, onion powder, herbs, mustard, and cayenne make a great salt free Creole/Cajun mix.
- Lemon zest and dill can lively up many dishes
- No salt chili powder, cumin and jalapeños, serranos, chipotles or habaneros can be used for south of the boarder flavor
- Blend equal parts of dried basil, oregano, garlic powder and a pinch of red pepper flakes
- Rosemary, thyme, lavender and fennel seeds are also called Herbs de Provence
- Marinate meats in a mixture of orange juice, dried tarragon leaves and ground pepper.
- One word GARLIC

SENIOR SECTION: Salt & Elders

With increasing age, salt sensitivity increases. This can lead to health problems like hypertension, obesity, water retention and congestive heart failure. As we age be sure and look for ways to reduce the amount of sodium you consume. Trimming down on salt intake may be a useful way to lower blood pressure in seniors suffering from hypertension. Cutting back on salt is one good way to help lower your blood pressure. Table salt makes your blood retain water and sodium, so it flows through your blood

vessels with greater force. This strains your blood vessel walls and can cause serious damage.



Diets that are high in protein and sodium can increase the loss of calcium from bones. Loss of calcium can lead to or worsen osteoporosis, which is especially important to native Elders, as many are lactose intolerant. Cola sodas are high in phosphates, which also can leech calcium from bones.

About 85% of older persons have one or more chronic diseases. Check with your doctor to see if you need a special diet that is low in fat, sodium, or sugar, yet still high in important nutrients. Many Elders drink a special liquid

supplement that is full of vitamins and minerals and has added calcium.

Besides diet, physical activity is part of a healthy lifestyle at any age. It can help reduce and control weight by burning calories. Moderate exercise that places weight on bones, such as walking, helps maintain and possibly even increases bone strength in older people. A study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association found that rigorous strength training can help conserve bone density and develop muscle tone, strength and balance in postmenopausal women. In the study, participants used weight machines for strength training. Also, scientists looking into the benefits of exercise for older people agree that regular exercise can improve the performance of the heart and lungs, increase strength and flexibility, and contribute to an over all feeling of well-being.



HOW TO EAT LESS SALT AND SODIUM:

Taste for salt is acquired. Like drinking diet soft drinks and decreasing use of sugar, taste for salt can be relearned. By cutting down on salt use gradually, the taste buds have time to adjust. The best way to cut back on sodium is to cut back on salt and salty foods and salt-based seasonings. When reading a Nutrition Facts Label, look for the sodium content. Additionally:

- Prepare lower sodium meals from scratch instead of using convenience foods that are high in sodium. Avoid using boxed rice and pasta mixes as well as hot cereals in individual serving packets.
- Read the Nutrition Facts Label to compare the amount of sodium in processed foods such as frozen dinners, packaged mixes, cereals, cheese, breads, soups, salad dressings,

and sauces. If you do choose to use these convenience foods, notice that the amount of sodium in different types and brands often varies widely. Pickled foods are another high source of salt.

- Look for labels that say "sodium free," "very low sodium," "low sodium," "reduced or less sodium," "no salt added" or "unsalted" on cans, boxes, bottles and bags.
- Try spices, herbs and salt-free seasoning blends instead of salt. Fresh vegetable and citrus juices work great too.
- Small amounts of cured or smoked meats can be used for flavor.
- Use the salt shaker sparingly. Taste your food before adding salt. Remove the salt shaker from your table or get one with smaller holes.
- Take note of the sodium content of your favorite condiments, particularly meat tenderizer, steak sauce, soy sauce, salsa, and catsup.
- Select fresh, frozen, or canned vegetables without added salt. Rinse canned vegetables in cold water before eating them.
- Choose fresh or frozen fish, shellfish, poultry, and meat more often than canned or processed forms.
- Snack on fresh fruits and vegetables, which are naturally low in sodium.
- Ask your grocer or supermarket to offer more low-sodium foods.
- Some people can use salt substitutes. These are high in potassium so people with kidney or other medical problems may not be able to use them. Ask your physician first.
- Ask your pharmacist about the sodium content of your medications.
- When you go out to eat, choose low sodium menu items and ask that they prepare your meal without salt or MSG. Use pepper instead of salt to season your meal. Many restaurants are happy to put sauces and dressings on the side, so you can control how much you add to your food. Just ask your server. You can also ask if they have a heart healthy menu or request that the chef prepare your food with your needs in mind. At salad bars, go easy on the salad dressings, toppings such as cheese, sunflower seeds and bacon bits as well as creamy salads such as potato, macaroni and coleslaw. Many Chinese restaurants even have low salt soy sauce--just look for the green caps.

American Dietetic Association, Complete Food and Nutrition Guide, R.L. Duyff, 1998.

**Dr. Coyotes Clinic: What You Need To Know About Your Health*

Dear Doctor Coyote: I just had my blood pressure checked on one of those free machines at the drug store and according to it mine was a little high. The information at the machine suggested reducing salt and getting more exercise. What would you recommend? Signed Borderline & Concerned.

Dr. C 's response: Dear Borderline: What are you out of your mind? I think the blood pressure has affected your thinking. First of all you trusted



a machine, can you feel your blood pressing on your veins any harder than normal? And where would we be as animals (or humans for that matter) without delicious salt? Sodium is the salt of the earth. Salt is so good for you that creator put in all foods and has great piles of it just lying around and even made sure the ocean was full of it. I find a nice big chunk of it next to your house is a great way to set up that backyard deer hunt. As for exercise you will get all you need just by lugging that carcass to the smoke house and adding all that salt, soy sauce, garlic and onion salt to make tons of yummy jerky for your friends and family.

Reasonable Health Practitioner's Reply: You are right to be concerned. High blood pressure (anything above 135/89) is dangerous. High blood pressure or hypertension (HTN) is the most common cardiovascular disease (a leading killers of Native people) and one of the largest health problems of our time. There are very few outward symptoms of increased blood pressure hence its nickname of the silent killer. HTN affects more than 60 million Americans and contributes to the deaths of at least 250,000 people per year in the United States. Too much salt in the daily diet is one of the leading causes of high blood pressure that you can control. Talk with your doctor soon about a low salt diet and adding exercise to help keep your blood pressure in check. While the machines like you found are not 100% accurate they give you a good base to monitor your own BP on a frequent basis your HIS clinic will also check your measurements to give you a better idea of your vital signs. Jerky can also be made using low sodium marinades and powdered spices without any added salt.



**Please remember that Dr. C is the Native Trickster. Follow his advice with great caution. He is Old-Man Coyote in most tribes, Raven in northwestern Indian tradition, or, more generically, "The Tricky One" (such as Wakdjunkaga among the Winnebago or Manabozho among the Menomini), but he has many other disguises as well. Trickster does not always speak the truth, but nonetheless you can learn a lot from him. If you have any health questions about this column please talk with your own medical advisor.*