



Salt. The nitty, gritty truth.

INSTEAD OF FOCUSING ON YOUR BELTLINE THIS HOLIDAY SEASON, KEEP YOUR HEART IN MIND EACH TIME YOU NIBBLE ON THOSE HOLIDAY TREATS!

Eating too much sodium significantly increases your risk of high blood pressure, stroke and heart disease.

Sodium overload has hit Americans hard in the past few years. Rather than making the majority of meals at home, we dine out and eat packaged foods more and more. To help these foods taste better and last longer, they are packed full of additional salt.

The average American consumes about 3,400 mg. of sodium a day, more than double the 1,500 mg. recommended by the American Heart Association. And while some may think holding off on the saltshaker at home is the best way to cut your sodium intake, you might be surprised. More than 75 percent of our sodium consumption comes from processed and restaurant foods, not a heavy hand with the saltshaker.

Not only does sodium consumption make your face feel puffy, increase swelling in your fingers and make your pants look, and feel, tighter, it also causes problems you can't see. A high-sodium diet makes your body retain fluid and your heart has to work harder to pump this fluid out. This added work weakens your heart over time and can increase your risk for stroke, heart failure, osteoporosis and kidney disease.

Cardiovascular diseases are the leading cause of death worldwide. The Office of Minority Health says that African American men are 30 percent more likely to die from heart disease than non-Hispanic white males.

High blood pressure is a major risk factor for heart disease. More than 32 percent of adult African Americans have high blood pressure compared with 22.5 percent of whites. One third of those with high blood pressure have it as a result of a sodium-rich diet.

Each year, Physician Assistant Katie Locklear sees more heart failure patients come through Cape Fear Valley's Transition of Care Clinic. The clinic helps patients learn ways to control their heart failure so they don't end up back in the hospital. More and more patients are being seen each year because of the added stress Americans put on their hearts through the foods they eat and the lifestyles they lead.

"It's not just older patients who are being diagnosed with heart failure in this community," says Locklear. "We are seeing patients of all ages come through the doors."

To better understand where the hidden salt in our diet comes from, the American Heart Association has come up with the "Salty Six." These six foods contain high amounts of sodium. Choose smaller portions of these foods or low-sodium varieties. The "Salty Six" include:

Breads & Rolls – Even though each serving of bread may not have a lot of sodium in it, it adds up when you eat multiple servings throughout the day. Try looking for lower sodium options in the bread aisle.

Cold Cuts & Cured Meats – One 2 oz. serving, or 6 thin slices of deli meat, can contain half of your daily recommended dietary sodium. Look for lower-sodium options.

Pizza – A slice of pizza with several toppings can contain more than half of your daily recommended sodium intake. Limit the cheese and add more veggies for a healthier option.

Poultry – Sodium levels in poultry can vary based on preparation methods. Cooking poultry at home will help cut down on sodium consumption.

Soup – Sodium in one cup of canned soup can range from 100 to as much as 940 milligrams. Check labels to find lower sodium options.

Sandwiches – A sandwich or burger from a fast food restaurant can contain more than 100 percent of your daily suggested dietary sodium. Try half a sandwich with a side salad instead.

"We see a lot of patients who are careful to read food labels but still end up back in the hospital," says Locklear. "One of the main culprits is reading food labels without paying attention to portion

size. One serving may only have a small amount of salt, but if you eat three servings in one sitting, you have to triple the salt quantity," says Locklear.

Locklear also warns patients to avoid putting additional sauces and dressings on their food. These things often have high sodium levels and you end up ruining a heart-healthy meal.

The average American consumes about 3,400 mg. of sodium a day, more than double what is recommended by the American Heart Association.

Many factors determine whether or not you are going to get heart disease. Luckily, eating a low-sodium, heart-healthy diet is one way you can help lower your risk for heart disease.

Learn how to reduce your risk of heart disease and heart failure on Monday, February 11, at our Community Education Event & Health Fair. Come enjoy a presentation by Michael Hodges, M.D., heart-healthy refreshments, free health screenings and exhibits. Attending will be Community Alternatives Program, Cumberland County Coordinating Council on Older Adults and Physician Pharmacy Alliance, which provides mail-order medications for patients even if co-pays cannot not be met. For more information and to register, call 615-LINK.



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