

## Guide for Reducing Salt And Other Sodium Containing Additives in School Meals



Salt and other products containing sodium are added during food preparation and processing to:

- Flavor foods
- Act as preservatives for many processed items
- Aid in the control of the rate of yeast fermentation in bread making

### *Suggestions for Moderate Use of Sodium*

There are many ways to decrease sodium and provide flavor to foods.

Fresh foods are typically lower in sodium than processed food of the same type. Generally, convenience-type food products are higher in sodium. The sodium content of processed foods can be easily determined by looking at the **Nutrition Facts** label on a food product. The amount of sodium will be listed in milligrams (mg). If a product does not list nutrition information, ask the food manufacturers, they are required to provide it upon request. Become sodium savvy by obtaining the **Nutrition Facts** for all processed food items and being able to recognize the sodium-containing ingredients.

The following are the FDA defined phrases used in sodium labeling:

- Sodium Free: < 5 mg sodium/serving
- Very Low Sodium: ≤ 35 mg sodium/serving
- Low Sodium: ≤ 140 mg sodium/serving
- Reduced Sodium: ≤ 25% reduction from usual sodium content

### *Menu Planning*

- Balance food items low in sodium with food items that are higher in sodium. For instance, include fresh fruits and vegetables on the menu when processed food items are planned as the main dish.
- Look for and try new low and reduced sodium products.
- Replace traditional crackers with brands of unsalted or lightly salted crackers, matzos, and bread sticks.
- Plan menus that limit the use of:
  - ✓ Large servings of high-sodium foods
  - ✓ Food prepared in brine, such as pickles, olives, and sauerkraut
  - ✓ Salty, smoked, or cured meat; such as bologna, corned or chipped beef, hot dogs, ham, luncheon meats, salt pork, and sausage
  - ✓ Snack items, such as potato chips, pretzels, salted popcorn, salted nuts, and crackers
  - ✓ Bouillon cubes, Worcestershire and barbecue sauces
  - ✓ Canned and instant soups
  - ✓ Prepared horseradish, catsup, and mustard

### *Sodium*

Sodium and sodium chloride (salt) occur naturally in foods, usually in small amounts. Processed foods often contain larger amounts of sodium. Sodium plays an essential role in the body to regulate fluids and blood pressure. High intakes of sodium have been associated with high blood pressure. For this reason, it is recommended that sodium and salt be consumed in moderate amounts to reduce the chance of developing this condition.

### *Nutrient Target for Lunch*

USDA has not set a standard for sodium.

DPI – SNT has set a limit of <1300 mg sodium averaged over the week for lunch.

1 tsp. salt = about 2,300 mg sodium

### *Purchasing*

- Compare nutrition fact labels and purchase those items with the lowest sodium content.
- Purchase herbs and seasoning powders, rather than salts (e.g., onion powder vs. onion salt). Why pay for the added salt?

### ***Preparation***

- Modify recipes by reducing the amount of salt and other sodium-containing ingredients. Make changes gradually to increase student acceptance. Try different herbs and spices as seasonings in place of salt or sodium.
- Make your own herb blends, vinegar, and spicy seasoning mixes. It will cost less and you control the sodium content. See section G-1 of the *USDA Quantity Recipes for School Food Service* for salt-free Italian and Mexican seasoning mixes.
- Make your own condiments, dressings, and sauces using recipes that minimize the amount of added salt and other sodium containing ingredients.
- Add a little dry mustard or a dash of Tabasco sauce to egg dishes instead of salt.
- Prepare and heat vegetables without adding salt or butter. Avoid using baking soda to retain the bright color of green vegetables. Instead, cook for the appropriate length of time.
- Use less or no salt when cooking pasta, rice, beans, and hot cereals. Add lemon rind or juice, in place of salt, to water that is used to boil spaghetti.
- Prepare soups and sauces from scratch using unsalted, defatted stocks.
- Prepare as many products from scratch as is feasible to control the amount of added sodium.

### ***Did you know?***

*Spices* are aromatics produced primarily from the bark and seeds of plants. Whole spices keep longer than ground spices, but all spices will retain their potency for about six months when properly stored. Store spices in sealed containers and keep in a cool dry place, away from extreme heat and direct light.

*Herbs* are the leaves of aromatic plants used primarily to add flavor to food. Aroma is a good indicator of quality in both fresh and dried herbs. Crumbling a few leaves between the fingers and then smelling the leaves can test the scent of the herb. Purchase only the amount of dried herbs that can be used within two or three months and store away from heat. Discard herbs when they take on a musty or flat aroma.

For **Vegetables** try adding, basil, garlic, onion, lemon or lime juice, oregano and paprika.

For **Meats** or **Poultry** try adding bay leaves, basil, cinnamon or cloves, garlic, ginger, mustard, oregano, parsley, rosemary, sage or thyme.

### ***Recipe Modification Pointers***

- During the recipe modification process, ask for input from all food service staff, especially those who will actually prepare the product.
- Include guidelines for preparing the modified recipe so that salt is not added to these recipes because it is perceived as a typo. This may be important when a familiar recipe has been modified.
- During training, emphasize that salt should not be added to recipes unless it is listed as an ingredient.

### ***What about using commercially prepared salt substitutes?***

Salt substitutes are partially or entirely formed from potassium chloride. These salt replacement products are intended to be added to food at the table and not in cooking. For this reason, the products will not generally be appropriate for use in preparing meals for school food service. Also, potassium chloride does not mimic the taste of salt but has a flavor of its own. The food will taste bitter if too much is added.

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