**Day 16**

**Title: Sodium and the Salty Six**

Our bodies need sodium to stay healthy and happy, but not as much as you might think. Most healthy adults should get less than 2,300 milligrams of sodium each day from all sources. But the average adult in the United States gets between 3,000 and 3,600 milligrams each day -- almost 50% more! Table salt is roughly 40% sodium, which means 2,300 mg equals roughly 1 teaspoon of salt per day. This teaspoon includes sodium already in foods and the salt you add yourself.

**Where is all this sodium?**

75% of the sodium we get comes from processed foods and foods eaten away from home, like in restaurants. So hiding the salt shaker may make only a small dent in how much sodium you get each day. Start cutting back on sodium by reading food labels.

In the table portion of the label, look for the word “sodium.” Look at the % Daily Value. Anything less than 5% can be considered low-sodium. A value greater than 20% is high in sodium, and it’s probably best to eat this rarely.

Words on the front of the package can also help. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has set specific guidelines for making certain claims about the sodium content in foods. Manufacturers can’t claim to have a low-sodium product without meeting those guidelines. Look for products that say things like:

* “Sodium free” or “salt free”: This product has less than 5 milligrams of sodium per serving
* “Unsalted” or “no salt added”: This product hasn’t had any salt added during processing. Some foods contain sodium naturally, so check the food label to make sure there’s not much sodium.
* “Very low in sodium”: This product has less than 35 milligrams of sodium per serving
* “Reduced sodium”: This product has at least 25% less sodium than the original

It also helps to know the types of foods most likely to have added sodium.

The American Heart Association has identified six types of food that contribute a lot of sodium to our diets. Some of the foods have a lot of sodium in them. Others have some sodium, but we tend to eat them so frequently, that the moderate amount really adds up. They call them “The Salty Six:”

* Breads and rolls
* Cold cuts and cured meats
* Pizza
* Poultry (some preparation methods add sodium)
* Canned soups
* Sandwiches

**How do I eat well with less sodium?**

Since 75% of dietary sodium intake comes from processed and other pre-prepared foods, the best way to still eat well and cut down your sodium is by cooking for yourself using fresh ingredients. This puts the control back in your hands.

Add flavor to your dishes by experimenting with different herbs, spices, peppers, and juices. Try lemon juice and dill with fish. Try rosemary, curry powder, or ginger with chicken. Add garlic (but not garlic salt) to just about anything savory. Look for inexpensive spices in your grocery store’s ethnic foods section, at your local farmer’s market, or even online.

Sometimes cooking from scratch or using all fresh ingredients just isn’t possible. Here are some suggestions on how to lower how much sodium you get and still get a meal on the table quickly and cheaply.

* Look for lower sodium varieties of foods that you normally eat. Look for the terms “sodium free,” “salt free,” and “reduced sodium”.
* Read food labels and compare brands. Choose lower sodium options.
* If lower sodium options aren’t available, remove the excess sodium where you can. Rinse canned vegetables with fresh water to reduce sodium.
* Choose frozen vegetables instead of canned. You’ll get the same nutritional benefits, but none of the added sodium.
* When buying poultry, look for varieties that have been air chilled rather than water chilled. Air chilling doesn’t add sodium.

**A final word**

Even though salt isn’t quite anenemy, the sodium in it can be harmful when consumed in excess over time. It may take some thought and effort to cut down the amount of sodium you get, but the long-term benefits of eating it in moderation are worth it. If you get too much sodium, make small changes here and there. Eat out less and cook more. Substitute spices for salt. Make dinner with fresh or frozen vegetables instead of canned. Along the way, you’ll decrease your sodium intake and get closer to your balanced diet goal.

**Sources:**

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