

Salt Matters: Preserving Choice, Protecting Health

[Narrator] Salt. The chemical name for it is sodium chloride. About 90 percent of the sodium we eat comes in the form of salt. Current dietary guidelines say Americans aged two and up should eat less than 2300 milligrams of sodium, or about one teaspoon of salt, per day. However, about half the population *should* get even less than that - a diet even lower in sodium, 1500 milligrams per day, is recommended for persons 51 and older and those of any age who are African American or have high blood pressure, diabetes, or chronic kidney disease.

[Dr. Thomas Frieden] Even those who try to watch what they eat may not realize just how much salt is in our food. Many Americans don't know that unseen salt drives up their blood pressure, increasing the risk of heart disease and stroke, which are the first and third leading causes of death in the United States.

[Narrator] Studies show that adults eat an average of 3400 milligrams of sodium every day; that's more than twice the recommended limit for most American adults and far more than the body needs. But the salt shaker is not the major problem, nor is the pinch of salt tossed into the spaghetti sauce. The overwhelming majority of the salt we eat, about three-quarters of it, is already in foods we buy from grocery stores and restaurants. But it's not only present in salty foods like cured meats, chips, and pickles. It's also hidden in foods that may not even taste salty, like cereal and condiments. And it's these hidden sources that make reducing salt intake challenging, for individuals and for society. Increased salt in the diet increases blood pressure. Increased blood pressure increases the risk for heart attack and stroke.

[Dr. Jeremiah Stamler] We have it from every source concurrently, in regard to salt and blood pressure; the evidence is extensive, consistent, strong, and worthy of the designation. It's a causative effect.

[Dr. Cheryl Anderson] The modification of sodium intake for individuals who have excessive consumption is incredibly important, whether or not individuals are hypertensive, whether or not they're African American, whether or not they're middle aged or older adults. This is a public health problem and one that's important for all Americans.

[Narrator] The tremendous burden of high blood pressure - hardened arteries, heart attack, heart failure, and even blindness - is accompanied by an alarming economic toll. According to recent estimates, U.S. costs for heart disease and stroke, to which high blood pressure is a major contributor, were an estimated 444 billion dollars in 2010. This includes spending on health care, lost productivity, death, and disability.

Changing individual behavior is very hard, even among the most motivated. That's why *improving* the available choices remains part of the public health effort, along with education.

[Dr. Stamler] The pleasure of eating is a very important pleasure of civilized human beings. None of us who have any sense would think of interfering with that pleasure. That pleasure is fully enjoyable, you just reeducate your taste buds.

[Dr. Frieden] Salt reduction in our food not only requires a new mindset, but a new environment, one in which healthier foods are the accessible and affordable default option for everyone. Salt matters. We must act and act now.

[Narrator] For more information, please visit www.cdc.gov/salt.