

Tips for Reducing Sodium without Reducing Flavor

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Many older adults depend on prepared meals such as those provided by senior nutrition programs. Meals provided by nutrition service providers make significant contributions (40% of daily calorie intake and up to 47% of daily nutrient intake) to the diets of older adults (Malbi, et al., 2017). Recent findings from the Older Americans Act Nutrition Title III-C Nutrition Service Program Evaluation revealed that sodium intakes were high for older adults who participated in congregate or home-delivered meals programs.

Table 1. Top 5 Contributors of Sodium to Senior Nutrition Program Diets

CONGREGATE NUTRITION PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS	HOME DELIVERED MEAL PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS
Sandwiches	Sandwiches
Mixed dishes with meat, poultry and seafood	Cured meats and poultry
Soups	Mixed dishes with meat, poultry and seafood
Sweet bakery products	Soups
Cured meats and poultry	Mashed potatoes

Reducing sodium in these meals is important for older adult patrons who need to limit their sodium intake, as well as clients with chronic kidney disease, hypertension, and heart failure.

FIELD-TESTED SUGGESTIONS

Humans can detect five basic tastes in foods and beverages: sweet, sour, salty, bitter, and umami. Flavor is our overall impression of all sensory properties (e.g., visual appearance, aromas, temperatures, textures, tastes, even sounds) in a food or beverage. Reducing the amount of sodium in a food may have a negative impact on the flavor of a dish and the overall liking of it. The following tips can help you reduce sodium in foods without having a negative impact on the perception of flavor.

- 1. COMPARE BRANDS:** When using processed foods like canned tomato products, cheese, bread products, and cured meats, compare brands to find ones with less added salt. Today, a number of brands offer reduced sodium or no-added salt versions of many products.
- 2. SWITCH TO A DIFFERENT SALT:** Some salt products have larger crystals. These crystals are large, “fluffy,” and less dense compared to fine grain table salt. Consequently, they provide less sodium per unit consumed. It is important to note, however, that some larger crystal salts may not be iodized.
- 3. USE SAVORY INGREDIENTS:** Umami is our fifth taste, often described as savory or meaty. Our perception of sodium in foods is enhanced in the presence of umami-rich ingredients like low-salt Worcestershire sauce, soy sauce, mushrooms, miso, and processed tomato products. Even though many of these are high sodium ingredients, you can use small amounts of them to improve flavor while contributing less sodium than if just table salt was used.
- 4. USE MORE ACID:** Adding vinegar, citrus juice, processed tomatoes, cultured dairy foods (e.g., buttermilk, yogurt), pickled juice, or other higher acid ingredients at the end of cooking can help balance flavors of a dish, lessening the need to add salt. Offering a citrus wedge as a garnish is one way to let the diner impart a fresh burst of flavor right before enjoying a meal.
- 5. MAKE SMALL SUBSTITUTIONS:** Tried and true methods of lowering sodium in meals served by senior nutrition programs include making menu modifications, such as using fresh fruits and vegetables instead of canned vegetables, rinsing canned vegetables and beans to reduce sodium (up to 40%), using less of the high salt item (cutting the item in half, using it sparingly in the dish, etc.), and swapping out salt in recipes for herbs, spices, and salt-free seasonings.

References & Sources of More Information

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