

ENOUGH OF THE SALT ALREADY

Americans are often oblivious about how much they ingest

By KELLY BOTHUM
The News Journal

You'd expect to find sodium in salt-and-vinegar potato chips, saltine crackers and canisters of salted peanuts. But what about a serving of low-fat cottage cheese, a couple of slices of whole-wheat bread or a packet of instant oatmeal?

Each contains anywhere from 250 to 350 milligrams of sodium per serving, potentially making your first meal of the day a lot saltier than you might have planned. At lunch, that can of condensed soup or frozen meal alone can account for 70 percent of the recommended daily intake of 2,300 mg of sodium set by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

And about those 2,300 mg: That figure actually represents the upper limit of salt consumption for healthy people. For many middle-age folks, senior citizens, African-Americans and those living with high blood pressure – groups that together account for nearly two-thirds of Americans – the recommendation is no more than 1,500 mg of sodium, an amount that can be consumed in one meal at a fast-food restaurant.

Most health professionals believe Americans are consuming way too much salt – an average of 3,500 mg of sodium each day, roughly the equivalent of 1½ teaspoons of salt. Most of the time, we don't realize we're overdoing it. A 2009 study by the International Food Information Council found that about 60 percent of all consumers weren't concerned about their own sodium levels, but they thought others should be worried, especially those with high blood pressure.

"The truth is that we really don't even realize how much salt we eat," said Jill Jayne, a registered dietitian in Jersey City, N.J., who teaches children about eating healthy foods.

That's why there has been plenty of talk about a report

See SALT – D7

Finding sodium in unexpected places

So you think your diet is devoid of hidden salt? Think again. Most Americans consume more than 3,400 milligrams of sodium a day – that's equal to 1½ teaspoons of salt. The bulk of that comes from packaged and processed foods.

A healthy individual with no health problems should consume no more than 2,300 mg of sodium, according to estimates from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The American Heart Association recommends consuming no more than 1,500 mg a day, the amount recommended for middle-aged and older people and those with health problems like high blood pressure.

Here are estimated sodium levels for some popular processed foods:

- 1/2 cup packaged spaghetti sauce: **430 mg**
- 1/2 cup low-fat cottage cheese: **360 mg**
- 1 multigrain bagel: **440 mg**
- 1 cup breakfast cereal: **60 to 280 mg**
- 2 slices of whole wheat bread: **340 mg**
- 1 package of seasoned noodles: **1,434 mg**
- 2 chocolate chip cookies: **180 mg**
- 1 tablespoon ketchup: **168 mg**
- 1 candy bar: **150 mg**

Sources: WebMD.com, ConsumerReports.org



Be Healthy Delaware: Walk It Off!

The challenge is officially over! Thanks to everyone who contributed miles to make



it a huge success. Together, we've walked more than 450,000 miles – amazing!

But we're not quite done yet. First, congratulations to our Week 8 winners: Debbie Robin of Middletown – two rounds of golf (donated by Salt Pond Golf Club); Denise Hardy of Magnolia – \$25 Amazon gift card (donated by Delaware Center for Health Promotion); Linda Shelby of Newark – American Heart Association cookbook and pedometer jump rope (donated by Christiana Care); and Ulla-Angela Temann of Hockessin – annual admission pass (donated by Delaware State Parks).

DELAWARE CENTER for HEALTH PROMOTION



Next, if you haven't already done so, go to www.delawareonline.com/walk to submit your miles for Week 10 (or call 831-1998 if you registered by phone). Make sure you submit miles by Friday in order to be in the running for this week's prizes.

Then, after you report your Week 10 miles, click on the link that says "Complete the survey." It takes just a couple minutes, is confidential and is the final step of the program before the drawing of grand prizes! This is the final step in the Walk It Off! challenge.

You have until May 18 to fill out the survey. The grand-prize drawing will take place May 19.

Reality theater

It's a safe bet to say that most popular reality programming doesn't involve much actual reality. But that's not the case for the "Healthy Choices for a Healthy Life" program this Thursday at Kingswood Community Center in Wilmington.

This interactive program features the cast of Theatrical Fusion acting out difficult-to-discuss but important real-life topics like teen pregnancy, premature births and living a healthy lifestyle. Representatives from Christiana Care Health System and Westside Family Healthcare will be on hand for the event, which also includes audience participation.

The program runs from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at Kingswood Community Center, 2300 Bowers St. Babysitting is available. For more information or to register, call (800) 693-CARE.

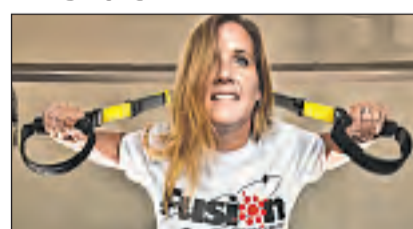
Get rid of old meds

Disposing of unwanted and expired medications in the sink or toilet leads to water contamination. Bring medications in their original containers to the nearest Medicine Cabinet Clean-out Day site from 8 a.m. to noon Friday:

- New Castle County Police Headquarters, 3601 N. DuPont Highway, New Castle.
 - Bayhealth Medical Center, 640 S. State St., Dover.
 - Tunnell Cancer Center, 18947 John J. Williams Highway, Rehoboth Beach.
- Call Delaware Helpline at (800) 464-4357 or visit www.delawarehealthyhomes.org.



inside



Never too busy to exercise

Single mom doesn't let two jobs and two kids deter her from working out. **D2**

Break a leg

Theater, nursing and physical therapy students share a training exercise. **D3**



Hear a new voice in the women's health discussion.

Listen to our new podcast on women's health issues at christianacarepodcasts.com. Or you can download it weekly from iTunes.



CHRISTIANA CARE HEALTH SYSTEM

www.christianacarepodcasts.com

Salt: Big-name food companies cut back on sodium

FROM PAGE D1

issued last month by the Institute of Medicine that focused on the need for reducing sodium in packaged and restaurant foods. As part of the report, the institute recommended that the Food and Drug Administration issue regulations that would gradually reduce the maximum amount of sodium manufacturers and restaurants can add to the foods and drinks they produce and serve.

Making these kinds of widespread reductions in sodium could save the lives of more than 100,000 people, according to the report. Excessive sodium consumption has been linked to high blood pressure, estimated to affect 75 million Americans, according to the American Heart Association.

Reducing rates of high blood pressure is important, because of its connection to heart disease and stroke, two of the top three causes of death in the United States, said Dr. Michael P. Rosenthal, chairman of the family and community medicine department at Christiana Care Health System.

"If they take some of the salt out, what will happen is that some people still will get strokes and heart attacks, but we believe many fewer will be affected," Rosenthal said. "I think the Institute of Medicine is putting this [report] out because they're attempting to make a big splash so that people are more aware of what salt in the diet does in terms of health."

Processed foods a problem

Physicians and dietitians say there's good reason to be concerned. Sodium is a necessary nutrient, responsible for helping the body to maintain the right balance of fluids, influencing muscle movement and helping to transmit nerve impulses.

But problems can arise if people consume more sodium than the body needs. Doctors are still unclear on the mechanics of exactly what happens, but consuming more sodium than can be excreted in the urine causes the body to retain water. The in-



The News Journal/FRED COMEGYS
Erica Porter is the project director for City Fare, which provides meals for New Castle County seniors through Meals on Wheels. All City Fare meals have 1,000 milligrams or less of sodium.

creased water creates a greater blood volume in the body, forcing the heart to work harder to move blood through the blood vessels.

Over time, the blood vessels begin to respond differently, causing an increase in blood pressure. Some people also can retain sodium more easily than others, increasing their risk.

Rosenthal likens high blood pressure to a garden hose. Turn it on halfway, and there's enough pressure to get the water pouring out. But if it's turned on all the way, the hose blasts high-pressure water.

Getting people to think about the sodium they're consuming can be a challenge because they are often so focused on the fat and calories in their diet, said Marianne Carter, director of the Delaware Center for Health Promotion at the University of Delaware.

People know what it means for a meal to have 500 calories and 20 grams of fat, but they're not as sure about what it means for a

frozen meal to have 700 mg of sodium.

About 11 percent of our daily sodium consumption comes from the salt shaker or slathering condiments like ketchup and mustard on the food we eat. But the majority — 77 percent, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — comes from packaged and processed foods found in grocery stores and served in restaurants.

Because American foods have become increasingly salty, adherence to a low-salt diet can take some effort.

But if children can have access to foods without high levels of sodium and other unhealthy ingredients, they won't develop a preference for salt-laden products, said Jayne, who is known as the "Rockstar Nutritionist" for her high-tempo musical programs that teach kids about healthy eating.

"The high amounts of added sugar, fat and salt improve shelf life of products, which improves companies bottom lines, but

not our waistlines," Jayne said.

What's more, people can successfully alter the way they eat so they get used to eating less sodium, said Carter, who remembers one client who successfully cut back on the amount of salt in his diet.

A few months after changing the way he ate, he went to a baseball game and had a hot dog.

"He couldn't believe how salty it was, and he couldn't eat it because his taste buds had adapted," she said.

Food companies respond

In response to the Institute of Medicine report, 16 food companies, including H.J. Heinz Foods, Kraft and Starbucks, have announced that they plan to voluntarily reduce the amount of sodium in the foods they produce. The manufacturers say they will eliminate 10 percent to 30 percent of the sodium from rice, pasta and other products over several years.

While most health professionals applauded the

Just a DASH

Patients diagnosed with high blood pressure are often advised to follow the DASH eating plan.

DASH stands for "Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension." The 2,000-calorie eating plan is heavy on fruits, vegetables and low-fat dairy products, all of which are naturally low in sodium. That means it takes less effort to reduce sodium consumption. The DASH diet also is rich in potassium, magnesium and calcium.

In studies, people with high blood pressure who followed the plan wound up with lowered blood pressure. Researchers also have found that the diet provides protection against heart disease, cancer and osteoporosis.

Sources: National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, MayoClinic.com

increased focus on the sodium content in foods, the report was not well received by the Salt Institute, which lobbies on behalf of the salt industry.

The group said the recommendations were based on flawed science and that population-based sodium reduction proposals don't take the whole body of science into consideration, including the debilitating effects of not getting enough sodium through diet.

Bronwyn Schweigerdt agrees the excessive sodium levels in processed foods contribute to high blood pressure, but she doesn't believe it's the only cause. Schweigerdt, author of "The Undiet," which advocates long-term weight loss without dieting, said Americans also need to focus on adding more foods with potassium, magnesium and calcium to their diets. The best sources are whole plant foods, including fruits, vegetables, whole grains and legumes.

These minerals draw and retain fluid outside of the cells, the opposite of how the body responds to sodium. As a bonus, these foods also are high in fiber, antioxidants and folic acid, which can prevent other chronic diseases.

"The more we increase these foods, the less sodium from processed foods affects our health," said Schweigerdt, who holds a master's degree in nutrition from Tufts University.

How seniors are affected

The Institute of Medicine report noted that all Americans would benefit from reducing the amount of sodium they consume. But there are some groups, including senior citizens, who are more likely to be affected. Up to 90 percent of older people are at risk for high blood pressure or developing pre-hypertension after age 50, according to the CDC.

That's an important consideration for City Fare, which provides lunch and dinner for New Castle County senior citizens through the Meals on Wheels program. About half of the Meals on Wheels clients have some kind of diet restriction, whether it's sodium, sugar or something else, said Erica Porter, project director for City Fare.

As a result, all of City Fare's lunches and dinners, which are prepared early in the morning by ShopRite, contain 600 calories and 15 grams of protein. They also have 1,000 mg or less of sodium, 1,300 mg of potassium and 90 mg of magnesium. The nutritional components are based on recommended dietary intakes for women 70 and older, Porter said.

For the most part, clients are pretty happy with their meals, she said, although some without sodium restrictions say they like to add salt.

Shaking the salt habit may be harder than most people realize, Rosenthal said. Taste, after all, plays a big role in what people like to eat.

"We are used to a lot of salt in our foods," he said. "It will take education and us making a cultural adaptation to have lower amounts of salt in our foods. Gradually over time, I think people will find it more acceptable."

Contact Kelly Bothum at 324-2962 or kbothum@delawareonline.com.



Sundays in...

The News Journal

Worth every minute.

delawareonline.com

