

## UC Davis Women's Cardiovascular Medicine Program

### "Reducing the Sodium in Your Diet- What Every Woman Should Know"

#### 1. Question: What adverse effects can high blood pressure have on a woman?

**Answer:** There is an increased chance of heart attack, stroke, heart failure, kidney disease, and possibly dementia as a result of high blood pressure that often is associated with increase in dietary sodium.

#### 2. Question: Does this vary by age (and if so, how)?

**Answer:** According to the Seventh Report of the Joint National Committee on Prevention, Detection, Evaluation, and Treatment of High Blood Pressure (JNC7), 50 million individuals in the United States have high blood pressure. ([www.nhbli.nih.gov/guidelines/hypertension](http://www.nhbli.nih.gov/guidelines/hypertension)) Increased blood pressure occurs in more than 2/3 of individuals. For individuals 40-70 years of age, each increment of 20 mmHg in systolic blood pressure or 10 mmHg in diastolic blood pressure doubles the risk of cardiovascular disease from 115/75 – 185/115. (JNC7). Improvements in blood pressure early may prevent further disease.

#### 3. Question: Is over consumption of salt a prevalent problem with women today?

**Answer:** Over consumption of sodium is very common. Many women pay little attention to sodium – they may be more concerned about low fat or low carb – following the culture trends. These "diet foods" often have more sodium to make up for missing flavors. There may also be a health belief about limiting sodium – that it is something "grandma" might do, not moms or daughters. Even women who are living healthful lifestyles may not be as tuned in to the sodium content of their diet.

#### 4. Question: Why do some women consume too much sodium?

**Answer:** Our culture tends to go for the dining out experiences as well as wanting quick meals. These quick meals, whether they are fast food or prepared items from the grocery store, are loaded with sodium. Restaurant meals can contain 1000 - 2000 mg of sodium or even more. For example, a plain bagel (up to 560 mg), canned or restaurant soups (1 cup = 750 – 1000 mg), McDonald's Big Mac (1,010 mg), Panera Greek Salad with Greek Dressing (1,560 mg), Chicken Caesar salad with dressing (4 cups = 1,490 mg), and Pizza Hut's Veggie Lover's Pan Pizza (2 large slices, 880 mg) are all high in sodium.

**5. Question: Are there trends women's sodium intake? Has it gone up, down, stayed level?**

**Answer:** Although there are many women who make conscious efforts to reduce the sodium in their diet, it does seem that sodium intake has gone up. There are various reasons some include quite possibly the increased use of convenience products, larger serving sizes, more restaurant meals, and an overall lack of awareness of sodium and its impact on blood pressure. Some people may think that if they don't salt their food or use salt in cooking that they are following a low sodium diet – that is not always true.

**6. Question: How do most women get excess sodium in the diet?**

**Answer:** Most women get their sodium from the following types of foods: soup, frozen entrees/dinners, lunchmeats, salad dressing, soy sauce, marinades, pasta sauce or canned tomatoes, broths, and rice and pasta mixes. Our culture seems to be on the fast track and our food lifestyle choices are reflective of this habit – convenient, quick, and with less awareness of what we are getting or missing.

**7. Question: What are some hidden sources of sodium? What are some foods containing high levels of sodium?**

**Answer:** There is no guessing anymore, one has to read each label carefully. Salad dressings, soups and broths, meat substitutes, lunchmeats, frozen entrees, and even some products labeled organic, low fat, or “low carb” may contain a fair amount of sodium. Boxed cereals, pickles, olives, and seasoning salt, soy sauce, lemon pepper, or other seasoning blends, and catsup are other examples. Even items at the health food stores are not necessary low in sodium. It doesn't have to taste salty to be high in sodium.

**8. Question: What recommendations would you give to a 20-45 yr old woman on how to reduce her sodium intake?**

**Answer:** The latest report from the Institute of Medicine recommends only 1,500 mg of sodium per day, less (1,300 mg) for people in their 50's and 60's, and even less (1,200 mg) for anyone over 70. The Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) Eating plan recommends filling up on vegetables and fruits, and low fat and nonfat dairy products as well as a diet low in saturated fat. Women may also consider including plenty of whole grains, beans, lentils, and choosing fewer processed foods. No added salt, no salt in cooking, using fewer canned soups and broths, and fewer pre-prepared foods may help too. Be cautious in using seasonings such as soy sauce, garlic salt, lemon pepper, or seasoning salt. Choose Mrs. Dash or other salt-free seasoning blends, vinegars, lemon juice, or fresh herbs for added flavor. Choose wisely in restaurants – avoid soups, added sauces, and soy sauce. For more information, ask your doctor for a referral to a registered dietician.