The Importance of a Low-Sodium Diet

**Why Is It Important?**

Sodium plays an important role in the body and is useful when eaten in small amounts. It helps maintain fluid balance in the body and regulates blood pressure and blood volume. Also, sodium is critical for the function of muscles and nerves by influencing their contraction and relaxation.

However, eating too much salt can be bad for the body. It attracts and holds water, which can cause high blood pressure and eventually lead to heart disease and stroke.

**HOW MUCH SALT SHOULD I EAT?**

For healthy individuals under 51 years of age, it is recommended to consume no more than 2300 milligrams per day. This may sound like a lot, however this is only 1 teaspoon of salt for the entire day!

For individuals who have high blood pressure, diabetes, kidney disease, or are over the age of 51, it is recommended to consume 1500 milligrams or less per day.

**WHERE IS SALT FOUND?**

Salt is found in most of the foods that we consume. Table salt contains 40% sodium. Salt is also added to food in the form of monosodium glutamate (MSG), sodium nitrite, sodium saccharin, baking soda (sodium bicarbonate), and sodium benzoate. It is important to read food labels to see if these ingredients were added.

Some of the more common foods containing salt are:

* Fast food
* Soup
* Cheese
* Processed foods
* Frozen foods
* Canned vegetables

**WHAT SHOULD I DO?**

The following are guidelines to follow to control the amount of sodium consumed:

* Eat fresh fruits and vegetables, not canned, whenever possible
* Read the Nutrition Facts label on food packages. If it contains 20% or more of the Daily Value, that means the food is “high” in sodium
* Purchase fresh meat that has NOT been injected with a sodium-containing solution
* Rinse canned vegetables with water before eating
* Remove salt from recipes whenever possible (except when baking)
* Limit the use of condiments high in salt (i.e. soy sauce, ketchup, dips, salad dressings, relish)
* When eating in restaurants, ask that your food be prepared with low sodium sauces or without salt at all (if possible)
* As an alternative to salt, use herbs and spices to flavor food

References

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