

THE LEAN PLATE

## Tossing out that salt shaker isn't enough

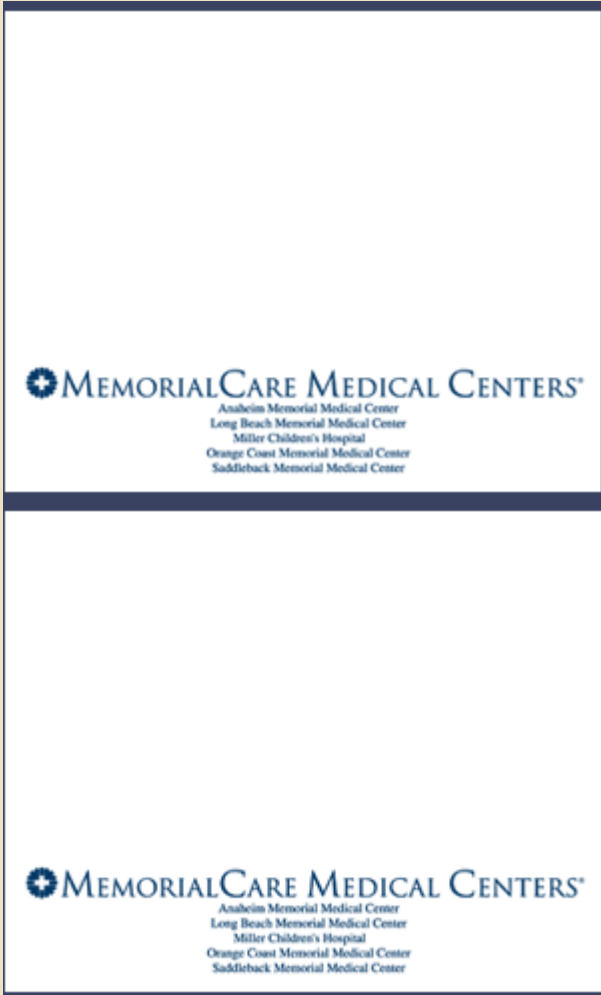
**Skip processed food and check labels for hidden surprises; fresh produce can counter effects.**

By Sally Squires, Special to The Times  
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Because blood pressure rises with age, the number of Americans with high blood pressure is expected to increase as the large baby boomer population edges past 60. Already, more than 30% of adults, an estimated 65 million Americans, have the condition, which increases the risk of stroke, kidney disease and heart problems. Ultimately, 90% of U.S. adults 55 and older are poised to develop it.

But many can side-step the condition, also known as hypertension, by making diet and exercise changes — including cutting sodium intake.

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Last week, the American Medical Assn.'s House of Delegates called for a 50% reduction in sodium content of processed foods, fast foods and restaurant meals over the next 10 years. The AMA, which represents a quarter-million of the country's physicians, also urged the Food and Drug Administration to revoke salt's status as a food ingredient "generally recognized as safe."

The latest U.S. dietary guidelines set the daily intake of sodium at 2,300 milligrams or less for

adults 50 and younger. That's equal to about a teaspoon of salt daily. For older adults, African Americans and people who already have high blood pressure, however, the recommended daily intake is 1,500 milligrams or less a day, about the amount found in a cup of canned chicken noodle soup and a slice of frozen cheese pizza. (Pepperoni and sausage boost sodium higher.)

"And remember, these are the daily maximums, not what you should aim for," says Edward Roccella, director of the National High Blood Pressure Education Program at the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute.

Tell that to the average American adult who regularly consumes 4,000 milligrams of sodium daily. (That's for every 2,000 calories eaten. Consume more calories, which many do, and get more sodium.) The AMA found that 95% of American men and 75% of women age 31 to 50 regularly ingest more than the upper daily limit for sodium.

Nor is hiding the saltshaker likely to help. Nearly 80% of the sodium consumed comes from restaurants, fast-food establishments and processed food.

Here's what you can do to help reduce the sodium in your diet and its ill effects.

- Reach for reduced-sodium processed foods. Commercially prepared soups can be major sodium offenders. The No. 1 selling Campbell's Chicken Noodle Soup has 890 milligrams of sodium a cup. Better choice: Campbell's Healthy Request Chicken Noodle with 450 milligrams a cup. Go lower with Campbell's Low Sodium Chicken Noodle with 120 milligrams — but even the company says it's not a taste winner. In August, Campbell's plans to introduce a new line of 25%-reduced sodium soups flavored with sea salt, a lower-sodium salt.
- Start your day wisely. Cheerios, oatmeal and shredded wheat are healthy whole grains. But Cheerios has 210 milligrams of sodium per ounce compared with zero for the other two.
- Crave salt? Soothe it with an olive, which clocks in at about 45 milligrams of sodium or an ounce of cocktail peanuts (110 milligrams of sodium for the regular salted nuts; 55 milligrams for the lightly salted) or taco chips (about 110 milligrams per ounce). Just skip the pickles: half a kosher dill pickle has 330 milligrams.
- Avoid salty surprises. Canned, bottled and processed foods highest in sodium include tomato products. Ketchup has 190 milligrams per tablespoon. Regular V8 juice contains 620 milligrams per 8 ounces; spicy has 720 milligrams — nearly half a day's worth for those age 51 and older. Two tablespoons of salsa has about 150 milligrams of sodium. Other leading sources of hidden sodium include bread, bottled salad dressings, marinades, sauces, luncheon meats, cheese and frozen dinners.
- Pig out on fruit and vegetables. They're packed with potassium, which helps counteract sodium's effects on blood pressure.