

## REDUCING SODIUM



In the first episode of this series on nutrition and special diets produced by Home Alone Alliance<sup>SM</sup>, you learned about the elements of a healthy diet and the information available on the newly redesigned Food and Drug Administration nutrition labels.

This video looks at one of the most common problems family caregivers face in creating a healthy diet—how to keep sodium/salt levels low while adding taste and zest to the food. Many older adults lose some of their sensory perceptions—taste and smell primarily—so the food that follows nutritional guidelines may seem bland and unappealing. Learning to use spices when cooking can help boost flavor without adding salt or sugar to the food.

First, here are some definitions. *Sodium* generally means *salt*. It is a natural mineral that is important to keep in your diet at recommended levels. These two terms are used interchangeably, and they mean the same thing.

The dietitian in the video explains that reducing sodium (salt) in the caregiver's mother's diet is particularly important because she has high blood pressure. If the caregiver reduces sodium in her mother's diet, she may be able to avoid having to take more medications. Multiple medications have their own risks, so reducing sodium can reduce the risk of developing conditions like congestive heart failure and kidney disease, and also reduce the chances of needing to take more medicine.

### The New Food Label

As described in the first video in this series, the Food and Drug Administration's nutritional labels now make it easier to find the amount of sodium in a product. For example, if the label says one serving of the product represents 5 percent or less of the recommended daily value of sodium, that means it is low in sodium, and a good choice. However, if the label says the product is

20 percent or more of the daily value, that means it is high in sodium; you should avoid that product.

Another way to cut down on sodium is to avoid commercially processed and packaged foods, which tend to be very salty. These products may also have added sugar or other undesirable ingredients. If you do choose packaged products, choose those that read "lower sodium" or "no salt added." It's a good idea to rinse canned vegetables in water to reduce sodium.

Preparing food at home is the best way to limit salt. And don't add salt to your food at the table. If this is difficult, don't put the salt on the table. This is good advice for the whole family.

### Salt Substitutes

Foods low in sodium do not have to be bland and tasteless. There are many ways to season food that add spice without adding salt. Herbs, spices, and lemon are timeless additions. A splash of vinegar (balsamic or apple cider) can make the flavor pop. There are also nonsalt seasoning blends on the market.

The Tufts University website MyPlate for Older Adults (<https://hnrca.tufts.edu/myplate/tips-extra-info/salt-alternatives/>) has a list of spices you can use in different

foods. You may already use garlic powder on meats or poultry and parsley in salads or fish. Oregano is an old favorite from Italian dishes, but you can also use it in soups, salads, vegetables, meats, and chicken. Think of the old song “Parsley, Sage, Rosemary, and Thyme”; try these spices to add zest and taste.

## Additional Resources

The American Heart Association has information how salt is linked to heart disease at <https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-eating/eat-smart/sodium/sodium-and-salt>.

For low-salt recipes, go to [www.AARP.org/NoLongerAlone](http://www.AARP.org/NoLongerAlone).

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