

Excess sodium has grim impact on global health

If you've seen the news today, you've probably noticed the coverage of 3 new research studies published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, a top medical journal. Here's a quick summary:

- One study estimated that eating more than 2,000 milligrams (*mg*) of sodium per day led to 1.65 million deaths from cardiovascular disease worldwide in 2010 (*the year for which the data were reviewed*). Almost 57,600 of those deaths were in the United States. It also noted that 99.2 percent of the world's adult population eats more than 2,000 mg/day of sodium.
- Two other studies questioned the link between too much sodium and health risks, suggesting that reducing Americans' current average sodium intakes (*3,400 mg/day*) isn't really necessary. It said that only people with high blood pressure, people age 55 or older, and people who eat more than 5,000 mg/day sodium should bother reducing their sodium. (*Note – there are millions of Americans who fall into one or more of these groups.*)

The American Heart Association issued a statement about this research and below are the highlights:

- According to American Heart Association President Elliott Antman, M.D., the studies that question the need for Americans to reduce sodium could have skewed results from inaccurate measurements of sodium intake and including people in the study who were already sick. (*For those interested in the nitty-gritty details about the issues with these kind of studies, you can check out the American Heart Association's February 2014 Science Advisory.*)
- The bulk of the evidence shows that lowering sodium in our diets is linked to lower blood pressure, and that in turn is linked to lower risk for heart disease. Recently, more than 30 leading scientists came together to vouch that the full scope of the evidence continues to warrant that we should cut back on sodium.
- Because more than 75 percent of the sodium we eat comes already added to prepackaged, processed and restaurant foods, it can be tough for us to eat less. "We need the help of food manufacturers, food processors and restaurant industries to help us make those changes to the food supply," Dr. Antman said.

What does this mean for you?

- The American Heart Association continues to recommend aiming for no more than 2,400 mg/day of sodium. Even better, reduce it to 1,500 mg/day to lower your blood pressure even more. Read more about how to track your sodium and our tips to reduce sodium.
- While limiting sodium is important, a healthy diet also includes other components. To get the nutrients you need, eat a dietary pattern that emphasizes fruits and vegetables; whole grains; low-fat dairy products; poultry, fish and nuts; while limiting red meat and sugary foods and beverages. Many eating plans fit this pattern, including the *DASH* (*Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension*) plan.

As Dr. Antman said in the association's statement, "we cannot afford to tarry any longer and continue to do a disservice to the public's health by inadequate action, given that the weight of the evidence indicates the substantive public health benefits and healthcare cost savings that would result from sodium reduction."

What do you think we need to do to help our country eat less salt?