

Strategies for Reducing Sodium in Healthcare Food Service

It's not surprising that most Americans should strive to consume less sodium in their daily diets. Still, like it or not, salt and sodium play an important role in our food and beverages. Sodium plays a part in overall good health as well. It requires a bit of a balancing act, giving healthcare foodservice professionals the chance to make a difference—from implementing menus with lower sodium to patient education.

The 2015 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends most Americans consume less than 2,300 milligrams of sodium daily. Adults in the United States today, however, consume about 3,400 milligrams of sodium per day.¹

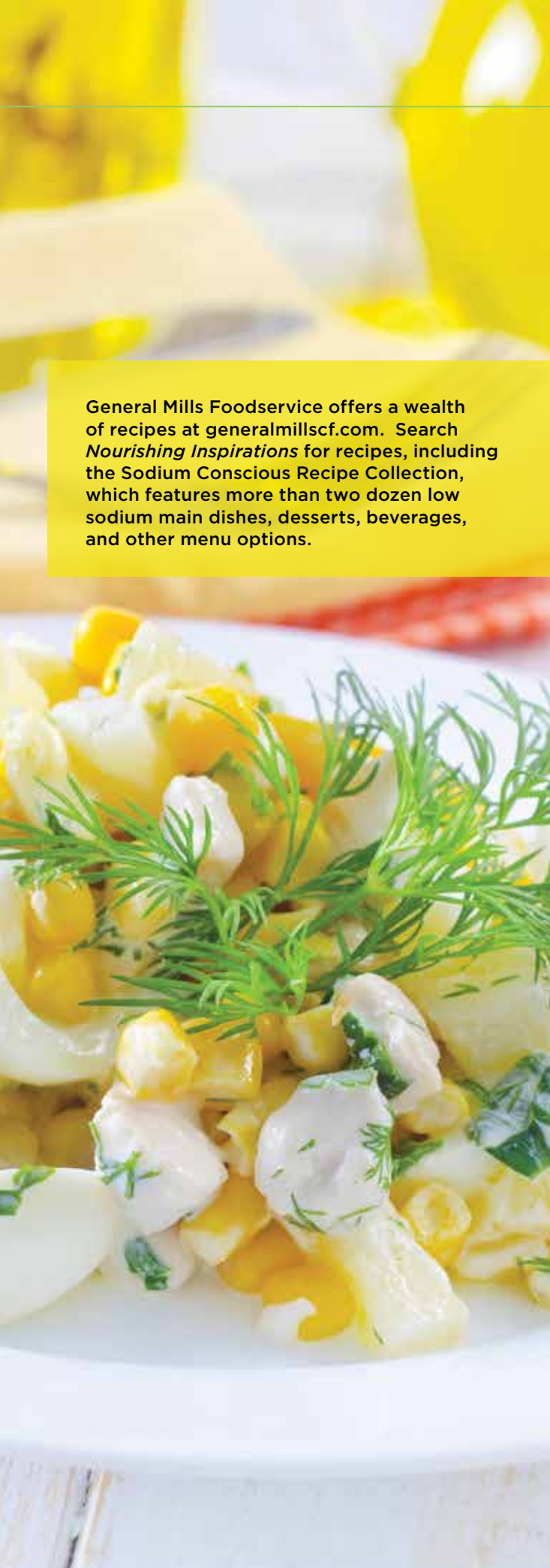
Within healthcare settings, the task of reducing sodium is an important one. In addition to the need to serve patients with specific dietary restrictions, hospitals have the ability to contribute to healthier eating patterns for the greater community.

THE ROLE OF SALT AND SODIUM

Salt and sodium provide a variety of functional benefits to foodservice operations, such as food preservation and safety, color development, binding, flavor enhancement and texture in many different products and menu offerings.

From a wellness standpoint, sodium is a nutrient that is important to support overall health. Adequate sodium levels help maintain fluid balance in the body, help to transmit nerve impulses, and influence the contraction and relaxation of muscles.





General Mills Foodservice offers a wealth of recipes at generalmillscf.com. Search *Nourishing Inspirations* for recipes, including the Sodium Conscious Recipe Collection, which features more than two dozen low sodium main dishes, desserts, beverages, and other menu options.

Salt, which is made up of 40 percent sodium and 60 percent chloride, is the most common source of sodium in the diet. Except for water, no other ingredient is as widely distributed in the food we eat. Sodium can be found in nearly every item in the food supply. Some foods, like deli and cured meats, canned foods, frozen entrees, salted nuts, pickles, and many salad dressings and sauces, tend to be higher in sodium.

Sodium isn't something to eliminate, but rather something to moderate in the diet. However, excess dietary sodium may contribute to heart disease and high blood pressure in some individuals, among other stressors on the body. High blood pressure now affects one in every three adults², according to the American Heart Association, and sodium reduction may play a role in reducing blood pressure for individuals who are sensitive to salt.

In the healthcare setting, in particular, many patients on heart health or renal diets require reduced sodium meals. Further, hospitals can act as an extension of the community, and better community health can start with balanced healthcare foodservice preparation.

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Michelle Tucker, MS, RD is a senior nutrition scientist at General Mills Bell Institute of Health and Nutrition. She supports health and wellness initiatives on many of General Mills businesses, including the healthcare channel.

GLUTEN-FREE QUINOA PORRIDGE WITH FRUITS AND NUTS

Servings: 40 (1 serving = 5 oz.)

INGREDIENTS

Porridge Base

- 2 c. Water, cool (72°F)
- 2 c. Juice, apple, unsweetened
- 1 c. Honey
- 2-1/2 c. Quinoa, raw
- 4-1/2 c. Oats, rolled, old fashioned, uncooked, gluten-free
- 1 Tbsp. Cinnamon, ground
- 2 tsp. Nutmeg, ground

Filling

- 2 c. Pears, fresh, cored, diced
- 2 c. Apples, fresh, cored, diced
- 4 c. Greek yogurt, nonfat, plain

Topping

- 2 c. Walnuts, roasted, chopped

METHOD

1. Mix all the porridge ingredients in a 2 gallon stock pot and bring to a boil.
2. Reduce heat and cook for 9 minutes on low heat while stirring frequently.
3. Place pot in bowl of ice to cool and refrigerate immediately after cooling.

ASSEMBLY

Fold the cold fruits and yogurt into the cold porridge and let it sit in the refrigerator at least 12 hours. Keep yogurt refrigerated <40°F until ready to prepare. Serve cold, garnish with walnuts.

NUTRITION FACTS

Get the Nutrition Facts for this recipe at generalmills.com, search Quinoa Porridge.

WHY WE LOVE SALTY FOODS

You can blame some of our love for salty foods on genetics – taste preferences are innate and some people are born with a predisposition towards salty flavors. In addition, salt can enhance other flavors, creating savory foods that entice the palate, and it is a part of our early positive food experiences and associations.

“The addition of salt in food preparation or product development can be for many reasons, including contributing to and enhancing flavor,” said Chef Gilles Stassart of General Mills Convenience & Foodservice, who works closely with healthcare foodservice professionals to provide education, training, and inspiration. “However, when it comes to healthcare settings, it is critical to pay particular attention to the amount of sodium patients are receiving to ensure that specific dietary needs are met.”

Stassart added that it is possible to appeal to people’s taste preferences and create flavorful menus that aren’t overloaded with sodium. “It just takes the right combination of careful planning and creative substitutions.”

TIPS FOR REDUCING SODIUM

The following sodium-management strategies for healthcare environments can support healthier eating and living:

- **Identify lower-sodium ingredients.** Simple swaps can keep menus on track – regular milk versus chocolate milk, fresh fruit and vegetables instead of canned, oatmeal over bagels, and fish or chicken instead of red meat. If you are unsure of sodium levels on foods that aren’t labeled, you can check Food-a-pedia, USDA SuperTracker, and the USDA’s nutrient database.
- **Spice it up.** Herbs, spices, and accents can add flavor without sending sodium sky-high. For instance, basil works perfectly with tomato sauces, soups, salads, and fish while garlic is wonderful with meats, vegetables, dressings, and savory baked goods. Try lemon juice with fish and vegetables. Sprinkle paprika on meat, poultry, and vegetables for a dash of flavor and color.
- **Exercise portion control.** Rather than offering three slices of bacon at 525 milligrams of sodium, opt for two slices at 350 milligrams. A small three-inch bagel has less than 350 milligrams of sodium, while a larger 4.5-inch bagel has about 660 milligrams. Likewise, when you serve small blueberry muffins, your patients and families will still enjoy juicy, familiar flavor but save about 230 milligrams of sodium over a medium-sized muffin. In terms of condiments, limit ketchup, ranch dressing for dipping, and barbeque sauce to about one tablespoon, and keep mustard and soy sauce to a teaspoon. Remember that low-sodium or no-salt-added alternatives for various foods are often available.
- **Focus on whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and yogurt.** These low-sodium options offer flavor, variety, and seasonality. From fruit-packed yogurt parfaits to stir-fry with brown rice, chicken and vegetables, you can add a powerful flavor punch while preserving the health benefits of patient, family, and staff meals.
- **Modify traditional recipes.** You don’t have to throw away your binder of tried-and-true recipes; instead, a few simple modifications can significantly reduce

the amount of sodium in your meals. Swap a meat marinade for flavored vinegar, and salted butter for unsalted; choose herbs and low-sodium condiments over salt. “You can turn a traditional beef cannelloni with more than 700 milligrams of sodium into a delicious low-sodium turkey cannelloni with fresh herbs at less than 150 milligrams. The food is still delicious; it’s just more health-conscious,” Stassart said.

- **Appeal to all of the senses.**

Taste is just one component when it comes to enjoying food. A variety of colors and textures, attractive presentation, and enticing aromas from herbs and spices can all add to the pleasure that patients, families, and staff derive from meals. Simply look to all of the food photos on social media – many taken before a single bite has been enjoyed – and you’ll recognize that a good meal engages many senses.

- **Let the little things add up.** You can create lower-sodium alternatives by adding yogurt to commercially-prepared salad dressings, or make your own condiments. Let patients punch up their own meals by offering shakers of spice blends. Avoid adding salt to pasta water or potatoes during cooking, and rinse canned products when possible. All of these small changes can add up to significant sodium savings.

EDUCATE ALL AUDIENCES

Staff training can help employees better understand the role sodium plays in our diet. Encourage your team to adopt a fresh approach to creating flavorful foods without added salt. It is also important to pay attention to “low-sodium” products that have unrealistic portion sizes. Finally, you can seek out industry experts for tips and advice on what is being done in other healthcare facilities across the country.

When your patients leave, provide them with a list of products that they can purchase and enjoy at home while also educating them on healthy portion sizes. When your menus announce that you are providing flavorful food without salt, patients will see and taste that principle in action.

“All of this comes back to being a community leader, to being thoughtful about how food is prepared and served, to committing to healthy practices, and to providing the education people need to succeed,” Stassart added.

To learn more, General Mills Foodservice recently conducted a free webinar, “What’s Shaking with Sodium?” that can be accessed at www.generalmillscf.com **E**

REFERENCES

1. IOM Committee Report on Sodium Intake in Populations: Assessment of the Evidence, May 2013.
2. American Heart Association, October 2016: http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/HighBloodPressure/AboutHighBloodPressure/About-High-Blood-Pressure_UCM_002050_Article.jsp#

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