



Making Food Healthier and Healthier Food More Affordable: Sodium Reduction Rationale

Walmart Commitment

Reduce sodium by 25 percent in key categories of food products in Walmart by 2015.

Suppliers will be asked to voluntarily fill out a scorecard annually so that Walmart can assess and report our progress towards our target.

Target categories

Key sodium categories include:

Grain products such as yeast breads and rolls, dough, cookies, crackers, and breakfast pastries

Meats such as luncheon meats, hot dogs, bacon, fresh poultry, pork, beef, frozen and canned chicken beef, and sausage

Dairy category items such as processed cheese, cottage cheese, semi- and hard cheese and egg substitutes are included

Sauces and condiments such as salad dressings, mayonnaise, ketchup, barbecue sauce, pasta sauce

Snacks such as potato chips, snack mixes, corn chips and cheese puffs

Packaged prepared foods such as soups, canned pastas, boxed dinners, frozen entrees, pizza, pasta, rice, potato sides, frozen potatoes, and frozen vegetables in sauce

Rationale

The 2005 Dietary Guidelines recommend Americans consume less than 2,300 mg (approximately 1 tsp of salt) of sodium per day. Additionally, it recommends individuals with hypertension, blacks, and middle-aged and older adults should aim to consume no more than 1,500 mg of sodium per day¹³. However, it is estimated that Americans on average consume 3,400 mg of sodium per day¹³.

Impact

Reducing the amount of sodium from foods in these categories listed, should help Walmart customers consume less sodium.

Background

Definition

Sodium is an essential nutrient, but very little is needed in the diet¹. Most foods in their natural state contain some sodium. Sodium can come from natural sources or be added to foods. Added sodium can serve as a preservative to inhibit the growth of food-borne pathogens and is used to modify flavor, bind ingredients, enhance color, and/or serve as a stabilizer¹.

Dietary Sources

Processed foods represent 77 percent of daily sodium intake¹⁰ and the top foods that contribute to sodium intake include¹:

- 19 percent - Grain/Mixtures/Pasta/Rice
- 10 percent - Breads
- 10 percent - Meat Mixtures
- 10 percent - Fruit and Vegetables
- 9 percent - Plain Meat/Fish
- 9 percent - Milk Products
- 7 percent - Lunch meat/Hot dogs
- 4 percent - Crackers/Chips/Salty Snacks
- 3 percent - Grain-Based Sweets
- 2 percent - Ready to Eat Cereal

- 2 percent - Eggs
- 1 percent - Pancakes/Waffles

Current Intakes

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the American Heart Association estimate Americans on average consume about 3,400 mg of sodium per day^{13,1}. This is about 1,100 mg more sodium than the 2,300mg recommended intake for healthy individuals.

Health Risks

Our bodies need salt to function, but too much can be harmful. Excessive salt intake can raise blood pressure, increasing risks of heart attack and stroke¹. In fact, increased blood pressure causes about two-thirds of strokes and almost half of all heart attacks globally. It has been estimated in recent studies that individuals who are pre-hypertensive and reduce their sodium intake, can reduce their risk of developing cardiovascular disease by 25 percent and the risk of dying by 20 percent³.

Researchers estimate for every gram of salt Americans cut from the diet, 250,000 fewer new cases of heart disease and more than 200,000 fewer heart-related deaths in the next ten years would occur. For every three-gram of salt Americans cut from the diet, or 1,200 milligrams of sodium, among all Americans would result in six percent fewer new cases of heart disease, eight percent fewer heart attacks, and three percent fewer deaths.

Health Society Recommendations

US Dietary Guidelines

The 2005 Dietary Guidelines recommend Americans consume less than 2,300 mg (approximately 1 tsp of salt) of sodium per day. Additionally, it recommends individuals with hypertension, blacks, and middle-aged and older adults should aim to consume no more than 1,500 mg of sodium per day¹³.

National Academies of Science

In 2005, the Institute of Medicine released new Dietary Reference Intake (DRI) values for the U.S. population and the daily sodium value was set at 1,500 milligrams/day to achieve adequate intake and 2,300 milligrams/day as the tolerable upper limit (UL) for intake⁹. Most recently, a report from the National Academies of Science outlined specific strategies for reducing sodium intake in the United States with the goal of reducing sodium intake by about 30 percent or greater over time¹⁴. Specifically, they recommend that the food industry voluntarily act to reduce the sodium content of foods in advance of the implementation of mandatory standards by:

- Voluntarily accelerating and broadening efforts to reduce sodium in processed foods,
- Working together to promote voluntary collaborations to reduce sodium in foods, and
- Establishing sodium specifications for the food that retailers purchase and the food operations they oversee¹⁴.

American Heart Association

The American Heart Association [recommends](#) that Americans choose and prepare foods with little or no salt to reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease and aim to eat less than 1,500 mg of sodium per day.

The Association is encouraging food manufacturers and restaurants to reduce the amount of sodium in foods by 50 percent over a 10-year period¹.

Regulations

In the U.S., FDA regulates the use of the content claims including phrases such as low- and reduced/less-sodium as well as phrases like "light", "no salt added", "unsalted" and "sodium-free."⁶

Other Sodium Reduction Efforts

Last year, a local effort by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene set targets for sodium in packaged and restaurant foods aimed at reducing Americans' salt intake by 20 percent over five years¹².

The EU and the UK have both implemented national models to reduce sodium across the food supply. Their approaches are different: the EU uses a broad-based percentage for reduction; and the UK has created sodium targets in mg by food categories^{4,7,8}.

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