

Sodium Reduction in Health-Care Facilities

Frequently Asked Questions

Where is sodium found?

Salt is made from sodium. Kosher salt, sea salt, fleur de sel, gourmet salt and smoked salt all have about the same amount of sodium as table salt. Sodium added at the table and during cooking makes up 11 per cent of the sodium we eat. Twelve per cent of sodium we eat is present naturally in food. Over 75 per cent of sodium we eat comes from processed foods. Salt and sodium are added to foods for many reasons besides taste, such as making meat tender and helping bread to rise.

Why reduce sodium intake?

British Columbians are consuming too much sodium - in many cases, more than double the amount recommended for good health. Eating too much sodium can lead to high blood pressure, stroke, heart disease and kidney disease.

Why has B.C. reduced the sodium content of hospital and residential care meals?

B.C. is focused on sodium reduction in health care in response to the Sodium Reduction Strategy for Canada recommendation 1-10: "... that the federal government, together with provincial and territorial governments, develop more consistent sodium guidelines and procurement policies for use by food service operations in publicly-funded institutions such as schools, daycares, hospitals, care facilities, correctional institutions and for the armed forces."

www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/nutrition/sodium/strateg/index-eng.php

Which health care facilities are affected?

All acute care and residential care sites owned and operated by health authorities.

Does this policy include food sold in hospital cafeterias?

No, this policy only applies to food that is served to patients and residents within health-care facilities.

Does this policy apply to all food that is served to patients and residents?

No, this policy applies to adult, residential, and pediatric general menus which are referred to as regular menus in some health authorities.

It is not intended for specialized or therapeutic menus as these are specifically established to meet the unique needs of patients or residents.

How are health authorities achieving a lower sodium content of patient and resident meals?

Each health authority is responsible for developing its own plan to reduce sodium. Since food service systems vary between health authorities, strategies to reduce sodium may be different. Plans may include removing the salt packages from trays, using more herbs and spices, cooking with less salt and buying more lower sodium products.

Are salt packages available upon request?

Yes.

How does the food taste?

Strategies to decrease sodium have been developed with consideration for the taste and quality of patient and resident meals. Health authorities are changing recipes and using more herbs and spices where possible to help ensure meals are flavourful.

What if a patient or resident has a low appetite and is not eating their meals?

This initiative does not prevent modification of a patient or resident's meals to meet their individual needs.

What about end of life or comfort care?

Quality of life is an important consideration and should be accommodated with respect to food choices. This approach does not prevent modification of a patient or resident's meals.

Are patients and residents able to receive special occasion meals that may be higher in sodium while in health-care facilities?

Yes, the average daily sodium level of patient and resident menus will be calculated by measuring the sodium levels on a weekly basis, rather than on a daily basis. This allows flexibility to offer foods that may be higher in sodium on special occasions.

Can patients still bring their own food into hospitals and residential care facilities?

Patients and residents are welcome to bring food from home as meets their needs within their care plan.

How is this policy being monitored?

Health authorities will report the sodium level of the adult, residential, and pediatric general menus to the Ministry of Health annually.

Have more questions about the policy?

Registered dietitians at HealthLink BC are available to answer questions that the public or health professionals may have about this policy. HealthLink BC can be accessed by dialing 8-1-1 and asking to speak with a registered dietitian.