

## LOW SODIUM DIET

Your physician has recently diagnosed your inner ear disorder and you can control these symptoms by STRICTLY following a low sodium/salt diet, as part of the comprehensive treatment plan prescribed. To follow a low sodium diet, you must give a great deal of thought to how and what you eat. With our busy lifestyles, often we just "grab something on the run." We enjoy the convenience of already prepared meals and snacks. "Fast food" is often high in fat, calories and sodium.

Healthy low sodium eating is not a problem, if you always consume FRESH FOOD PRODUCTS. Simply, you need to eliminate processed, canned, frozen, manufactured, precooked, and deli counter foods from your diet. Most fresh, natural foods contain very little sodium. The majority of the sodium in our diets comes from the preparation of these foods. In addition, salt is often used as a preservative in processed foods. There are few restrictions to the fresh foods you can eat - meat, poultry, fish, vegetables, fruit, many dairy products and whole grains. There is an abundance of spices, herbs and flavorings that can be used to enhance the taste of the foods, without adding salt. The important thing to remember is that they also be fresh and not combined with any sodium. Food can be prepared in any way you wish. It can be raw, broiled, roasted, boiled, sauteed, fried, or baked as long as no salt is added.

It is most important to plan your meals, so you will not be caught far from home absolutely famished. Bag lunches can be packed and brought along with delicious fresh items. Of course, if a microwave oven is available, almost anything can be packed for a warm meal. Preservatives in processed foods also contain sodium and chemicals, and labeling often does not give that information to the consumer. The following words and symbols are "red flags" telling you that these product are NOT on your low sodium diet. Na (chemical symbol for salt), NaCl (table salt), MSG (monosodium glutamate), baking soda, baking powder, salt, and sodium. Once you have settled into this new eating pattern, it will be very easy to follow. "Regular" food will taste much too salty for you to enjoy. However, it takes time to change your well established habits of not only what you eat, but how you eat.

For many people, eating is part of socializing with others and maintaining friendships. "Let's meet for lunch", "Do you want to have some coffee?", "How about a drink?" - are all pleasant ways of being with other people. These social occasions do not need to end; they just need to be modified. A drink is fine, but the salty nuts, crackers, cheese and chips are not. Meeting for coffee is splendid, but the sodium rich pastries that usually accompany the coffee need to be avoided. When dining out with friends, you can be assertive in choosing a restaurant that provides the food you can eat. You might also suggest social activities that do not revolve around food - such as walk on the beach, shopping, a movie, or a game of tennis. The last thing you want to do with your chronic inner ear problem is to lose your social support system!

**Tips for Eating Out:** Here are some suggestions from the American Dietetic Association about eating away from home, which is so prevalent in our fast-paced lifestyle:

1. Always ask the server for help. Request that foods be prepared without salt. Ask for sauces to be served on the side. Select plain fruit and vegetable salads and flavor them with lemon wedges, pepper, oil and vinegar.
2. Use pepper, lemon-juice or bring your own herb and spice mixture to enhance the flavor of foods.
3. Keep it simple. Often special sauces and toppings add extra sodium to foods. Ordering broiled meat, fish or chicken is a better choice than an entree covered with any sauce. Plain

meat sandwiches with fresh vegetable toppings, such as lettuce and tomato, are always lower in sodium than chicken, egg or tuna salad sandwiches. All cheese is highly processed and is to be avoided.

4. Recognize words that may indicate a high sodium content. Look for clues such as marinated, pickled, smoked, teriyaki, soy sauce, or broth.
5. Remember that prepared mustard, catsup, salad dressing, and sauces ALL are high in sodium content. You can prepare them yourself with fresh ingredients.
6. Baked potatoes, fresh vegetable salads and fresh fruit are always dependable items to order when you are out.
7. When you eat at other's homes, offer to bring a fresh vegetable or fruit platter. Your host or hostess will welcome the hors d'oeuvres and there will be something other than salty snack foods to nibble on before dinner.
8. When picking up a quick snack while "on the go", choose an apple or an orange rather than a salty snack such as a twist pretzel or potato chips.

**Sodium Restricted Diet (low salt diet):** A sodium restricted diet requires commitment and some knowledge of the sodium content of foods and beverages. Many foods have their sodium content listed on the label in milligrams-(mg); one thousand milligrams is equivalent to 1 gram.

We recommend that you try to restrict your sodium intake to *1 gram per day*. This will require more than simply not adding salt to your diet. In order to learn how to control your sodium (salt) intake and prepare palatable foods, you may want to purchase a book on the topic.

**Helpful Reading:** Several books and pamphlets are available that give guidelines, and a few are listed below:

*Jane Brody's Nutrition Book.* Bantam Books, 1989. List price (paperback) \$16.95. A comprehensive overview of nutrition including tables of sodium content of foods, the importance of sodium, fiber, cholesterol, fat and vitamins.

*American Heart Association's Low-Salt Cookbook:* A complete guide to reducing sodium and fat in the diet. Times Books, 1995. List price (paperback) \$5.99. Gives tables of sodium content and recipes for low salt meals.

*The Diet Center Cookbook,* by S. Ferguson. Simon & Schuster, 1986. List price \$8.95. A beginner's book on specialized diets, some recipes.

*Get the Salt Out: 501 Simple ways to cut the salt out of any diet,* by Ann Louise Gittleman. Crown Publishers Inc., 1997. List price (paperback) \$11.00. Includes tips for reading labels to find salt (including brand-specific suggestions), how to avoid salt when you eat out, some recipes.

*Booklet #527Y: Dietary Guidelines for Americans.* U.S. Government Printing Office. FREE if you write to: S. James Consumer Information Center-2C, P.O. Box 100, Pueblo, CO 81002. General dietary guidelines based on recent nutritional research. Not specifically directed to a sodium restricted diet.

*Booklet: Trader Joe's Sodium Free Products,* SKU #15922, 6/96. Free at Trader Joe's markets.