Partnering with Food Service to Reduce Sodium

A Toolkit for Public Health Practitioners

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Disclosure and Collaboration

This toolkit was developed by Health Resources in Action and the National Network of Public Health Institutes through the Cooperative Agreement CDC-RFA-OT13-1302 with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
Health Resources in Action

A non-profit public health institute, based in Boston.

Mission
• To help people live healthier lives and create healthy communities through prevention, health promotion, policy and research.

Commitment to Equity
• HRiA works at the junction of population health, policy, research, and practice, helping clients and funders in private philanthropy; local, state, and federal government; community organizations; and health care systems address and solve some of the nation’s most fundamental health challenges.

Principal Services
• Research and evaluation; strategic planning; training and capacity building; program planning; organizational development; health communications; advocacy and policy development; environmental health; grants management; and information and referral services.
Polling Question

Have you worked on sodium reduction efforts?

a. Yes…specifically a focused sodium reduction effort
b. Yes, as part of a broader nutrition effort
c. Not yet
Background

Over $\frac{3}{4}$ of sodium consumed by Americans comes from processed and prepared foods

- Too much sodium is associated with elevated blood pressure
- Risks include heart disease and stroke

Opportunity to partner with food industry to reduce sodium throughout the food supply – from manufacturing to distribution to procurement to preparation to sales/marketing and consumption.
Purpose of Toolkit

To provide public health practitioners a list of strategies, tools, and resources to build new and/or enhance partnerships with food service providers to reduce sodium in foods prepared, served, and sold.

To help public health practitioners understand the context of food service settings as well as the language and drivers of food service providers.
Audience for Toolkit

Primary audience: public health practitioners

Secondary audience: food service industry
  › food service directors/providers/operators,
  › health care-based group purchasing organizations,
  › regional food service manufacturers, distributors, and vendors.
Development Process

Environmental Scan
• Online search for promising models and interventions
• Focus on efforts of food service providers
  › SRCP grantees most prevalent
  › Food Management Companies
  › Food Manufacturers.
  › Food Service Providers

Seven Key Informant Interviews:
• Two Food Manufacturers
• One Food Distributor
• Two Food Service Provider
• One Health Care agency
Key findings that informed toolkit

Sampling of successes:

• Positive changes in perception around products offered
• Expanded customer base
• Increased demand from consumers, and improved customer relations
• Cost savings or neutral impact
• Positive staff response
Key findings that informed toolkit

Sampling of Challenges:

- Compromises in taste and/or quality of products
- Hard to maintain standardization of food preparation
- Lack of resources for marketing and communicating changes
- Hard to make operational shifts -- time and resources are limited
- Perceived business risk
- Vendor and distributors do not always offer products
INTRODUCTION

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS WITH FOOD SERVICE PROVIDERS

ASSESSING THE FOOD SERVICE ENVIRONMENT

IMPLEMENTING EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR SODIUM REDUCTION

CONTINUED WORK IN SODIUM REDUCTION
Toolkit: Content

Case Study:
University of Vermont Medical Center — Redefining “hospital food” as fresh, local, and sustainable

BACKGROUND
In 2006, the University of Vermont Medical Center (UVM MC) was one of the first organizations in the country to sign Health Care Without Harm’s Healthy Food in Health Care Pledge (Pledge). The Pledge aimed to improve the health of patients, communities, and the environment through the foods procured and served in hospital and health care settings.

The following are some highlights of what Pledge signers commit to do:

- Increase offerings of fruits, vegetables, and nutritionally-dense and minimally processed foods;
- Promote and use foods that are locally and sustainably sourced; and
- Encourage vendors and/or food management companies to procure foods that are free of synthetic pesticides, hormones, or antibiotics.

To access the full Pledge, go to:
https://noharm-uscanada.org/content/us-canada/healthy-food-health-care-pledge.

OPPORTUNITY
University of Vermont Medical Center has always recognized that health goes beyond clinical care, and that nutrition and food systems are intricably linked to the health of their patients and community. Prior to signing the Pledge, UVM MC already engaged in scratch cooking for most foods served; thus, signing the Pledge was a natural extension of the direction in which they were already going. As Diane Iannicci, Director of Nutrition Services stated, “The Pledge was an important commitment to make. The foods we offer should reflect University of Vermont Medical Center’s mission of health promotion.”

STRATEGIES
Surrounded by farmland, UVM MC is uniquely positioned to partner with local farmers and access locally sourced produce, meats, and cheeses. UVM MC collaborated with and supported farmers to scale up production of ingredients such as produce and chicken, and established volume incentives.

UVM MC also employed numerous health-promoting strategies, including (but not limited to):

- Procuring organic products from distributors;
- Eliminating fryers from hospital kitchens;
Introduction

Over three-quarters of the sodium consumed by Americans comes from processed and prepared foods\(^1\) — and the average American is consuming well over the recommended daily allowance.\(^2\) Consuming too much sodium is associated with elevated blood pressure, posing health risks including heart disease and stroke, which are leading causes of death\(^3\) in the United States.

Partnering with food service providers in venues such as worksite cafeterias, hospitals, and congregate food sites (such as meal delivery and elder services) presents a key opportunity to reduce sodium consumption. Yet these food service providers experience constraints and real-world challenges that can make it difficult to reduce sodium content of foods or offer lower-sodium alternatives. Time, professional training, availability of ingredients, consumer preference, and overall concerns about costs and the bottom line are important considerations when working with food service providers to reduce sodium.

In the last few years, market demands and food trends have helped to build a case for reducing sodium in the food supply. Many companies in the food industry have embarked on efforts to reduce sodium, with several meeting National Sodium Reduction Initiative standards.\(^4\) And consumer interest in fresh, locally-sourced foods and “clean labels” (simplified ingredient lists on food labels) present opportunities and motivation to reduce sodium content.

On behalf of Health Resources in Action (HRIA) and the National Network of Public Health Institutes, we hope you find this toolkit useful for your partnerships with food service providers. If you have any questions or comments, please direct them to HRIA.\(^5\)

RELATED RESOURCES:

- Health and Sustainability Guidelines for Federal Concessions and Vending Operations, US Department of Health and Human Services and General Services Administration
- Smart Food Choices: How to Implement Food Service Guidelines in Public Facilities, US Department of Health and Human Services

The resources above and others can be found on the CDC’s Healthy Food Service Guidelines web page: https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/strategies/food-serv-guide.html

Salt Stats, CDC

One-page, quick facts about salt and the toll it takes on our health and health care costs

\(^1\) https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/1910064
\(^2\) http://www.ars.usda.gov/SP2UserFiles/Place/80400530/pdf/1112/Table_1_NIN_GEN_11.pdf
\(^3\) https://www.nap.edu/read/10925/chapter/1
SODIUM AND FOOD SERVICE GUIDELINES

Food service guidelines are often used to provide specific support to food service providers for delivering and encouraging healthier foods and beverages in food service facilities.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and General Services Administration (GSA) developed the *Health and Sustainability Guidelines for Federal Concessions and Vending Operations* for food available for purchase at food service concession operations and vending machines in federal facilities. One of the goals of these guidelines is to assist contractors in maximizing a healthier and sustainable food service by decreasing the sodium content in available foods. Such guidelines are in place to help individuals meet the dietary recommendations for a healthy eating pattern outlined in the 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, which limit sodium to less than 2,300mg per day for adults and children ages 14 years and older.

“Standard criteria” for sodium from these guidelines include:

- All individual food items must contain ≤480 mg sodium as served, unless otherwise designated in the specific categories of the Food Selection Standards in Concessions and Vending.
- All meals must contain ≤500 mg sodium, as served.

**Food Standards in Concessions (related to sodium):**

- **Standard Criteria**
  - All vegetable offerings must contain ≤130 mg sodium, as served
  - Mixed dishes containing vegetables must contain ≤480 mg sodium, as served
  - All cereal, bread, and pasta offerings must contain ≤130 mg sodium per serving
  - Processed cheeses must contain ≤130 mg sodium per serving
  - Canned or frozen tuna, seafood, and salmon must contain ≤190 mg sodium per serving, and canned meat ≤480 mg sodium per serving
  - Vegetable juices must contain ≤130 mg sodium per serving

- **Above Standard**
  - Offer at least one prepared vegetable option with ≤40 mg sodium as served
  - If cereal is offered, offer at least one cereal with ≤40 mg sodium per serving
  - Offer at least one low sodium vegetable juice (≤40 mg sodium per serving)
Toolkit: Content

- MANUFACTURERS
- DISTRIBUTORS AND VENDORS
- BROKERS
- SALESPEOPLE
- CONTRACT FOOD SERVICES
- FOOD SERVICE MANAGERS/DIRECTORS
- GROUP PURCHASING ORGANIZATIONS
- CHEFS
- FOOD SERVICE LINE STAFF
- FOOD SERVICE PURCHASING STAFF
- DIETITIANS
Toolkit: Content

1. RECOGNIZE THE VALUE AND EXPERTISE OF FOOD INDUSTRY PARTNERS

   Consult with partners as expert advisors at every step, including the earliest stages of planning.

2. MAKE THE BUSINESS CASE

   Demonstrate consumer support and demand for lower-sodium, healthy products, and address potential financial impacts of sodium reduction efforts.

   **Consumer Support**
   - **Infographic: 74% of Americans Want Less Sodium.** American Heart Association. Nearly 6 in 10 adults have tried to reduce the amount of sodium in their diets, and three-quarters want less sodium in processed and restaurant foods.
   - **What Do Consumers Really Think About Policies to Reduce Sodium?** CDC

   **Business Solutions**
   - **Talking Points for Public Health Responding to Common Perceived Barriers among the Food Industry**
   - Sodium reduction can bring costs savings and other benefits: For employers offering food service to their employees, reduced sodium can improve health outcomes and thereby improve employee productivity and reduce absenteeism. For employers who self-insure, reduced sodium consumption can lead to the additional benefit of reduced health care costs. Sodium reduction in institutional settings can lead to lower health care costs and taxpayer savings. Reduced sodium consumption among the entire population will lead to decreased health care costs overall (States Stand to Save Hundreds of Millions in Health Care Costs with National Sodium Reduction Effort, Center for Science in the Public Interest, May 21, 2105).
   - **Success Story: Reducing Sodium Makes Cents: How Morrison Healthcare Is Moving the Marketplace toward Healthful, Lower Sodium Food for Smaller Purchasers**
NUTRITION ENVIRONMENT ASSESSMENT TOOLS THAT INCLUDE SODIUM

Healthy Hospital Food and Beverage Environment Scan, CDC
Comprehensive tool assessing cafeteria and vending in the hospital setting

A Step-by-Step Guide, Using the Healthy Hospital Food, Beverage, and Physical Activity Environment Scans, CDC
Comprehensive guide for implementing strategies based on the Healthy Hospital Food and Beverage Environment Scan

Nutrition Environment Measurement Surveys, or NEMS
Tools that assess the overall environment based on different settings, including restaurants, cafeterias, vending, and others. Tools, resources, and trainings are offered by the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania.

- NEMS Restaurant Measures (NEMS-R), Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania
  The updated NEMS-R assesses the nutrition environment in restaurants based on eight types of food indicators, including healthy main dish choices, availability of fruits and vegetables, children’s menus, pricing, and others.

COST- AND TIME-EFFICIENT ASSESSMENT APPROACHES

“Sodium Savvy”
Use this simple 14-question survey to determine how “sodium savvy” a food service setting is, and to identify areas for improvement.

High-Sodium Product Categories and Key Ingredients
Assess use of these five high-sodium product categories in food preparation to guide decisions about product replacement and kitchen preparation practices. Many of these ingredients are used across recipes, so addressing one high-sodium ingredient can lead to reduced sodium in multiple recipes.

- Soup bases
- Canned tomato products (see Training Video for Food Service Providers: Reducing Sodium with the World’s Premier Culinary College: Tomato Sauces)
- Culinary Institute of America and National Network of Public Health Institutes
- Breads and rolls
- Cheese
- Sauces and dressings
- Cold cuts and cured meats
- Poultry

https://vimeo.com/193668413
STRATEGY: PRODUCT REPLACEMENT

Product replacement involves identifying ingredients and foods that contribute to the sodium content of meals or dishes, and identifying lower-sodium alternatives in order to reduce overall sodium content without compromising flavor. This is often achieved by assessing pantries, dishes, and recipes for sources of high sodium and replacing them with lower sodium options, such as low-sodium beans, soup stock, and tomato-based products.

RELATED RESOURCES

Restaurant Guide: Cut the Sodium but Keep the Flavor, California Department of Public Health
Includes 9 easy strategies for sodium reduction that maintains flavor with examples and tips

How Sodium Savvy is your food service and Sodium Savvy Food Service Tips, Schenectady County, NY
Simple 14-question quiz and related tips to reduce sodium

Reducing Sodium: Citywide Partnerships and Nutrition Standards, Philadelphia Department of Public Health
Describes strategies to reduce sodium including product replacement

Success Story: Partnering with Worksite Cafeterias to Provide Lower Sodium Options: San Antonio, Metropolitan Health District
Highlights product substitution and how partners used purchasing power to negotiate lower-sodium products.
STRATEGY: BEHAVIORAL ECONOMICS AND MARKETING

Behavioral Economics

These approaches involve altering features of the physical or social environments to lead to behavior changes to increase purchase and/or selection of lower sodium foods. Examples may include the display and presentation of lower-sodium options, positioning of lower-sodium options relative to higher-sodium choices, taste testing/sampling, and labeling and other promotional strategies. These strategies come at low- or no-cost, and they can have a positive impact on sales.24

Marketing

Research has found that sodium reductions of up to 20% are not noticeable to consumers, depending on the food product (Sodium Reduction in Food Service: A Resource for Public Health Professionals Partnering with Food Service Providers, NNFHI and CIA). "Stealth health" approaches, that is incorporating healthier ingredients or preparation methods into food items without drawing consumer attention to these changes, can be an effective strategy when reducing sodium in dishes, as long as the changes are gradual over time and do not "hide" ingredients from consumers who may have food intolerances, allergies, and dietary preferences. Another option is to consider a labeling system that identifies foods as "heart healthy," using colors ("red, yellow, or green") or other image/naming conventions. The term "heart healthy" may include but not be limited to reduced sodium. With any marketing strategy, attention should focus on making the healthier option the easier and more appealing option and be adjusted based on consumer selection and sales.

See Case Study: Feeding America — Employing behavioral economics to promote healthy choices on page 22.

RELATED RESOURCES

Talking Points for Public Health: Responding to Common Perceived Barriers among the Food Industry. ChangLab Solutions
Smart marketing, including "stealth health"

Smart Food Choices: How to implement Food Service Guidelines in Public Facilities.
Includes marketing and promotion strategies (placement, promotion, pricing, labeling)

Using the Toolkit

Introduce public health staff to sodium reduction strategies

Develop a plan when approaching food industry

Learn how to assess a food service environment

Share ideas for strategies

Access it here:
• [https://nnphi.org/sodium](https://nnphi.org/sodium)
Polling Question

Do you think this resource would be helpful and relevant to your work on sodium reduction OR with food service professionals?

a. Yes, I can’t wait to check it out!

b. I think so but need to review it first

c. No

d. Not applicable
Questions and Feedback

Health Resources in Action
• Karen Schoneman –
  kschoneman@hria.org
• Stacey Chacker –
  schacker@hria.org

Network of Public Health Institutes
• Kelly Hughes –
  khughes@nnphi.org