



Nutrition and Aging Resource Center

FDA Sodium Guidance and Healthy Meals for Older Adults

Reducing Sodium Intake Can Save Lives

National evaluations of the Older Americans Act (OAA) Title III-C Senior Nutrition Program (SNP) show the program promotes older adults' access to nutritious meals, enables social contact, and reduces the likelihood of facing adverse health events. This tip sheet provides information on a national sodium reduction initiative and how it can assist the aging network in meeting OAA Title III-C Nutrition Services requirements.

Sodium Affects OAA Participants' Health

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that over 74% of Americans 60 and older have hypertension.¹ Excess sodium intake is linked with hypertension, a leading cause of heart disease and stroke. To promote health and well-being in SNP participants, it is important to manage the sodium content of OAA SNP meals.

According to the current Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGAs), most Americans consume about 3,400 mg of sodium daily.² This is 50% higher than the DGA recommendation of $\leq 2,300$ mg daily for people 14 and older. Sodium is an essential nutrient that can improve food flavor, texture, and help prevent microbial growth. Most sodium in the U.S. diet comes from commercially processed foods and foods prepared in restaurants.

Recent Food and Drug Administration (FDA) guidance on sodium includes dietary considerations for older adults since blood pressure tends to increase with age. This signals an understanding by the FDA that older Americans can benefit from reductions of sodium content in commercially packaged, processed, and prepared foods from grocery stores, restaurants, and community meal programs.

Federal Guidelines

The OAA (Section 339) requires that all OAA-funded meals adhere to current DGAs, provide at least one third of the Dietary Reference Intakes (DRI), meet state and local food safety and sanitation requirements, and be appealing to older adults. Program evaluations of the OAA SNP show the program benefits older Americans' health by preventing costly medical interventions.³

In 2021, the FDA issued "Guidance for Industry: Voluntary Sodium Reduction Goals."⁴ This guidance document established voluntary targets for reduced sodium content in select commercially processed, packaged, and prepared foods due to excess sodium in the food supply and excess sodium intake by Americans. This FDA guidance aims to:

1. Support increased food choice for consumers that is consistent with DGA recommendations by encouraging food reformulation and new product development.
2. Support the DGAs and help Americans reduce average sodium intake through the voluntary reduction of sodium in food manufacturing and food service industries by 2024.
3. Focus on the total amount of sodium in a given food as opposed to individual sodium-containing ingredients.
4. Provide uniform measures (mg of sodium per 100 g of food) for voluntary sodium reduction in sixteen categories of common foods that have the biggest impact on sodium intake.
5. Support and extend industry's voluntary efforts to reduce sodium across the range of commercially processed, packaged, and prepared foods.

Benefits of the FDA Guidance include:

- Gradual reduction of sodium over time allows manufacturers a period for product reformulation and for consumer taste preferences and expectations to adjust.
- An overall reduction of sodium in the food supply will provide a supportive environment for consumers to reach sodium intake levels recommended by the DGAs.
- Decreasing sodium intake is expected to reduce the rate of hypertension, cardiovascular events, premature death, and health care costs as indicated in other countries implementing sodium reduction strategies.

Considerations for OAA Title III–C Nutrition Service Providers

- The FDA Guidance supports meeting the OAA Title III–C SNP requirements:
 - DRI nutrient requirements and current DGA recommendations.
 - Meals that are appealing to older adults.
- The FDA Guidance supports the OAA Title III–C SNP goals:
 - By assisting older adults in gaining access to nutrition and other disease prevention and health promotion services.
 - To delay the onset of adverse health conditions resulting from poor nutritional health or sedentary behavior.
- Provide nutrition education that shows program participants how to adopt healthy and flavorful lower sodium foods into their diet.
- Develop food specifications that include criteria for reduced sodium content.
- Prepare written agreements for food or meal vendors that specify sodium reduction in prepared foods and the use of low and no sodium seasonings.
- Conduct monitoring and evaluation practices to track progress in lowering sodium intake.

Sodium Reduction Resources

- [Guide to SUA Sodium Policies and Guidance](#): Examples of state policies and materials related to sodium content of meals.
- [Building Emergency Shelf-Stable Meals](#): Factors and tips for creating shelf stable emergency meals.
- [Create a Flavor Station](#): Information on creating a flavor station including options for low sodium seasonings.
- [Managing Sodium in Meals and Menus](#): How to reduce sodium when buying food, in menu planning and meal production. Includes menu labeling examples.
- [Salt and Sodium](#): Defines salt versus sodium and how to calculate added sodium in recipes.
- [Sodium Reduction Resources](#): Resources used by schools and nutrition programs to lower sodium in meals.

References

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