The American Heart Association recommends limiting daily salt to less than 1,500 milligrams (mg) in order to reduce the risk of high blood pressure, damage to the heart, kidneys and blood vessels — and possibly even obesity. Yet the average person in the U.S. consumes about 3,436 mg per day. While 1,500 mg represents a substantial reduction, cutting down may be easier than you think.

MAY 2011

Hot flashes are a common complaint of women during menopause. The most effective treatment, hormone replacement therapy, has dropped in popularity due to findings that it can increase the risk of heart attacks and stroke. A recent study suggested that medications called selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs, such as the antidepressant fluoxetine) may reduce hot flashes by 50 percent or more. Other treatments, such as over-the-counter supplements, have shown disappointing research results. If you have hot flashes, consider reviewing the medication options with your healthcare provider.

— Zorba Paster, MD

LONGEVITY CORNER

News Flash on Hot Flashes.

Smart moves for reaching a heart healthy best are at www.personalbest.com/extras/may11tools.
**GOODNESS from Scratch**

Eating home-cooked meals can be a good way to trim fat, sugar and salt from your diet. However, many people find that their hectic schedules leave little time for cooking — but with a little planning and prep work, homemade meals can be quick and hassle-free.

1. **Create a recipe repertoire.**
   Keep cookbooks easily accessible, mark favorite dishes for handy reference or put recipes in a binder with the quickest meals listed first. Get new ideas from library cookbooks and websites such as www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov.

2. **Plan meals in advance.**
   Make menus for a week or two and generate a list of required ingredients. To save money, plan meals around what’s on sale.

3. **Stock up on staples** such as 100-percent whole-grain pasta, cereals, bread, rice, canned tomatoes and beans, garlic, onions, low-salt bouillon or stock, eggs, nuts, fresh or frozen produce (some can be steamed in their bags), lean meats, oil, fresh or dried herbs and spices. Chop fresh herbs and freeze in a small ice cube tray.

4. **Prepare a roasted chicken,** chopped vegetables, fruit salad, soup and a green salad on the weekends. Make healthy snacks to go — try a trail mix of nuts and dried fruit or make muffins. Put fruits on the counter for easy access.

**All aboard:** Designate kitchen roles for each family member — kids can learn good nutrition from the start.

### Ways to Cut Sodium from Your Diet

Try lemon juice, herbs and spices, hot sauce, onion or garlic powder, flavored oils, pepper and vinegar instead of salt.

**Help is on the way:** Some major food manufacturers are responding to the Food and Drug Administration’s call to reduce the salt in processed food, making it easier for consumers to limit their sodium intake.

**Challenge No. 1:** 77 percent of salt consumed comes from packaged, processed and restaurant food.

Pick products with the lowest sodium (salt) content per serving (aim for 140 mg or less) by checking nutritional labels. Choose unsalted, low-sodium and sodium-free items whenever possible. Major sources of sodium include: cheese products, tomato sauce or juice, soups, condiments, canned foods, prepared mixes and lunch meats. When dining out, ask for low-sodium menu choices, have salad dressing on the side and ask for little or no cheese.

**Challenge No. 2:** Medications can be a source of high amounts of sodium.

Scan the ingredients of over-the-counter drugs (such as antacids) for sodium, and look for low-sodium versions. If you use bicarbonate of soda, look for no-sodium versions.

**Challenge No. 3:** How do I cook without salt?

Choose raw ingredients without added salt, especially when purchasing broth, butter, bouillon, soup, nuts and sauces.

### Know Your Numbers: Blood Pressure

- **Have you had your blood pressure checked recently?** High blood pressure (hypertension) increases your risk for several conditions, including heart disease and stroke.

- **Prehypertension** means you’re likely to develop high blood pressure unless you take steps to control it. During High Blood Pressure Education Month, consider the numbers:

  - **140/90** = high
  - **120/80-139/89** = prehypertension
  - **<120/80** = normal

“Shared laughter creates a bond of friendships. When people laugh together, they cease to be young and old, teacher and pupil, worker and boss. They become a single group of human beings.” ~ W. Lee Grant

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