

PHILADELPHIA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH | Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Reducing Sodium: Citywide Partnerships and Nutrition Standards



Problem

Americans consume too much sodium, which increases the risk for hypertension, heart disease, and stroke. Almost 38% of adults in Philadelphia have high blood pressure, which is a major risk factor for heart disease—the leading cause of death in the United States.

Project

The Philadelphia Department of Public Health collaborated with the Office of Supportive Housing and Riverview Home to implement nutrition standards that help limit sodium content of foods purchased, prepared, and served by the facility.

Outcomes

Since 2012, average sodium content for foods served by Riverview Home has been reduced by nearly 16%. The facility implemented several sodium reduction strategies, including reducing portion sizes of high sodium foods and changing food preparation practices to include less salt.

Resources

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Salt www.cdc.gov/salt
- Get Healthy Philly <http://foodfitphilly.org>
- Philadelphia Department of Public Health www.phila.gov/health

Statement of Problem: Americans consume too much sodium, which increases the risk of hypertension. Hypertension can lead to heart disease and stroke, two of the leading causes of death in our nation. The 2015–2020 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommend consuming no more than 2,300 milligrams (mg) of sodium daily. However, the average American adult consumes 3,500 mg per day. In Philadelphia, nearly 38% of adults have high blood pressure. The Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH) is working to prevent high blood pressure and other chronic diseases in Philadelphia through a number of strategies that include reducing sodium consumption.

Project Description: In 2010, PDPH launched Get Healthy Philly, a public health initiative promoting healthy eating, active living, and a smoke-free existence in Philadelphia by coordinating partnerships with government agencies, community-based organizations, academia, and the private sector. The initiative, now transitioned to the Division of Chronic Disease Prevention, is supported in part by CDC's **Sodium Reduction in Communities Program**. Through Get Healthy Philly, PDPH is making significant strides toward improving nutrition in the city via menu labeling in restaurants, promotion of healthy food sales in corner stores and farmers' markets, reduction of sodium in popular dishes as part of the Healthy Chinese Take-Out Initiative, and new partnerships with local hospitals.

In 2014, Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter signed an executive order to make meals in city departments healthier by establishing citywide nutrition standards for foods and beverages purchased, prepared, or served by city agencies. City agencies and programs serve more than 20 million meals each year, presenting a unique opportunity to reshape the food environment in Philadelphia. The *Philadelphia Comprehensive Food Standards* provide guidance on nutrients, portions, and meal components for food served, prepared, or purchased by city agencies and limit the sodium content of these foods.

PDPH has since been working with multiple city departments to implement the standards. One particularly successful partnership is with Riverview Home, an adult care residential facility housed within the Office of Supportive Housing (OSH). The facility is home to about 107 residents 52 to 93 years old, and it serves approximately 240 resident meals daily, in addition to snacks.



“PDPH’s successes in its sodium reduction work with OSH demonstrate the importance of including partners throughout the creation and implementation of nutrition guidelines.”

For more information please contact

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road NE, Atlanta, GA 30333

Telephone: 1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636)/
TTY: 1-888-232-6348

E-mail: cdcinfo@cdc.gov

www.cdc.gov

February 2016

PDPH, OSH, Riverview Home’s leadership team, and Riverview Home’s food service management company, Lintons Managed Services, connected early in the process of implementing the nutrition standards and pledged to make changes to the menu and food service. PDPH staff toured the facility’s kitchen, reviewed menus, and made recommendations for reducing sodium and improving nutrition for residents. PDPH also worked closely with Lintons’ dietitian to apply the nutrition standards to new menus for the facility.

Outcomes: The strong partnership that PDPH developed with OSH and its food service provider allowed PDPH to provide technical assistance on sodium reduction before implementing contracts requiring adherence to the citywide nutrition standards. In partnership with PDPH, Lintons’ dietitian reviewed purchasing options and revisited food preparation practices to find opportunities to reduce sodium content. As a result of this review, several strategies are now being implemented at Riverview Home, including the following:

- Preparing soups from scratch using a lower sodium recipe
- Replacing canned vegetables with frozen or fresh vegetables
- Reducing portion sizes for high sodium foods
- Changing food preparation practices to include less salt while using herbs and spices to enhance flavor

Since 2012, the average daily sodium content for foods offered in the facility’s menu has decreased by almost 16%, which corresponds to a 660 mg reduction.

To help residents adjust to the menu changes, PDPH educated residents about the health implications of reducing sodium in menu items. Changing the sodium content gradually has also helped residents adjust to the changes.

Conclusions: PDPH’s successes in its sodium reduction work with OSH demonstrate the importance of including partners throughout the creation and implementation of nutrition guidelines. In the coming year, PDPH plans to maintain a menu analysis reporting system designed to help departments assess their progress in incorporating the *Philadelphia Comprehensive Food Standards* into their food service practices. PDPH will also continue to offer ongoing trainings on the standards and on general nutrition, develop and share resources with departments, and provide technical assistance for putting plans into action. Current goals include reducing sodium content within prisons, emergency shelters, and summer and afterschool programs, among other services offered by the city.

The content of this article is not an endorsement by the City of Philadelphia of any particular service, product, or vendor.