

Public Health Practice Stories from the Field



Sodium Reduction Campaign Encourages Healthy Choices Among Consumers

Massachusetts Highlights the Main Sources of Sodium to Promote Heart Health

75%

of the sodium Americans consume comes from restaurant and processed foods

One in four

adults in Massachusetts have high blood pressure

New statewide campaign

focuses on the most common sources of salt and ways to reduce sodium consumption

53

Mass in Motion communities have access to the campaign as a tool to promote a healthy diet

The average American eats about 50% more salt than recommended by health experts. However the main culprit isn't the salt shaker — approximately 75% of the sodium we consume has been added by food manufacturers and restaurants during processing, packaging, or cooking.

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health launched the “Choose Less Sodium” campaign to bring awareness to the amount of salt in store-bought and restaurant food. The statewide effort provides education about the negative impact of excessive salt consumption and ways to make healthier choices when purchasing processed food in supermarkets or in restaurants.

Too much sodium can lead to serious health problems, including high blood pressure, heart attack, and stroke. According to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, more than a quarter of adults in Massachusetts have high blood pressure and many aren't aware of it or treating it as prescribed by their doctor. High blood pressure and cardiovascular disease account for more than 100,000 hospitalizations and 17,000 deaths every year in the state.

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What We Did

The “Choose Less Sodium” campaign appeared in multiple formats across the state to reach a mass audience, including transit display advertisements in the 10 major transportation systems in Massachusetts; posters in health care providers’ offices, community health centers, and other community locations; and a televised public service announcement. The materials were translated into Spanish and Portuguese to reach more of the state’s population. In addition, [sodium website content](#) was revised to help residents make healthier choices and reduce salt intake.

The campaign messages focused on the following:

- The harmful effects of excessive salt in the diet
- Most dietary salt comes from processed foods in stores and restaurants
- The amount of salt can vary in common foods based on the brand
- Ways to reduce sodium consumption
- Amount of salt recommended based on U. S. Dietary Guidelines

What We Accomplished

“Choose Less Sodium” is now a resource to promote a healthy diet across Massachusetts — at worksites, health centers, physician offices, hospitals, WIC sites, community centers, and in 53 Mass in Motion communities across the state. Mass in Motion is an obesity prevention program that addresses sodium reduction through a number of different initiatives, including Healthy Dining programs in some communities. In addition, plans to expand “Choose Less Sodium” include working with restaurants and food manufacturers located in Mass in Motion communities to change their policies around procurement and provision of healthy, low sodium food options.

What We Learned

The campaign is being evaluated to determine if there were changes in the sodium attitudes and behaviors, as well as recall of the campaign messages. The evaluation plan includes a pre-campaign survey (conducted in August 2011 with 792 respondents), post-campaign survey (conducted in October 2011 with 728 respondents), and a follow-up survey (planned for April /May 2012). The surveys use a combined random-digit dial and online sampling.

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