

REDUCING SODIUM MAKES CENTS

How Morrison Healthcare Is Moving the Marketplace Toward Healthful, Lower Sodium Foods for Smaller Purchasers



Sodium Limits in Morrison's Retail Menu

- ▶ **720 mg for combo meal items**, including a center-of-the-plate item such as lean protein, a serving of whole grains, a serving of fruit, and a serving of a non-fried vegetable
- ▶ **600 mg for entrees**, such as burgers, sandwiches, and pastas
- ▶ **200 mg for side dishes**, such as vegetables, salads, or a la carte items
- ▶ **200 mg per package for snacks** served at registers in all Morrison cafés

Statement of Problem

Exposure in the hospital setting to unhealthful foods containing excess sodium can lead to increased sodium consumption in already sick populations as well as their families, hospital staff, and the public. Many food purchasers have cited cost concerns as a reason for not sourcing and purchasing lower sodium foods and ingredients. Further, hospitals frequently contract with foodservice companies to supply patient and visitor foodservice operations, and hospitals rely on the knowledge and expertise of these companies when deciding what foods to provide. Depending on the volume of food purchased and other factors, including the duration and specifications included in contracts, hospitals and the foodservice operators with whom they contract vary in purchasing power and ability to negotiate for new products and prices.

Project Description

More than 600 hospitals nationwide use Morrison Healthcare, a member of Compass Group, to supply their health care foodservice operations. With more than 450 executive chefs and 18,000 foodservice associates, Morrison has significant purchasing power that enables them to acquire lower sodium ingredients without negatively affecting their bottom line.

In 2013, Morrison transitioned its retail menu to include at least 60% healthy offerings, including lower sodium options. These foods were incorporated into the menu using the following strategies:

- Enhancing flavor through modified cooking methods.
- Using seasonal and sustainable foods.
- Appealing to all the senses, not just taste.
- Incorporating functional foods and ingredients, such as cold water fish, nuts, and whole grains.
- Working with food manufacturers to develop and provide lower sodium, more healthful foods.
- Reducing portion sizes.

Patient menus also benefited. Morrison's new *Great Living* patient menu reduced daily sodium intake from ~4,500 mg to 2,300 mg. Making these changes required sourcing new ingredients and negotiating with business partners and manufacturers to develop lower sodium alternatives at an affordable price.

Although some of the new ingredients were more expensive, Morrison's large buying power and participation in a group purchasing organization protected their bottom line. Further, Morrison recognized that many of the company's wellness initiatives are fueled by the idea that increasing access to better-for-you foods across communities should decrease the amount their clients spend on health care because of nutrition-related diseases.

Other purchasers, including smaller groups, can also benefit from the changes Morrison has made. The new, lower sodium ingredients are available to Compass Group's other foodservice sectors as well as to other purchasers outside the Compass system. For example, sodium in a frequently used pork loin dropped by 30% and in a tomato product by 96% (360 mg to 15 mg), and these products were made available to other purchasers large and small. Morrison's purchases have encouraged manufacturers to reduce sodium by developing lower sodium recipes, thereby increasing access and availability to lower sodium products.

Lessons Learned

Making these changes was not free of challenges. Although Morrison sourced lower sodium ingredients without sustained negative cost implications, cooks still needed training on more healthful cooking techniques, increasing labor costs for both management and foodservice/preparation. However, the extensive training also allowed for cross-use recipes; for example, teaching cooks to reduce sodium in a tomato sauce used with pasta also translated to reduced sodium in pizza and tomato soup base.

Morrison also learned a few things about marketing healthful foods. Initially, short-term sales declined in certain markets because packaging focused on wellness too overtly. After Morrison transitioned to active sampling and not marketing foods as "healthy" versus "traditional," the company began to see greater sales improvement that in some instances surpassed the original product's level.

Lastly, the cost of preparing ingredients from scratch versus purchasing them assembled had a negligible effect on costs, resulting in a decrease in total food costs overall but an increase in labor costs. However, product quality improved in many of the made-from-scratch versus purchased ingredients, making a big difference in the overall recipe. As portion sizes decreased, some food costs declined, but staff needed re-training in executing the recipes correctly, such as in preparing the new quantity of portions.

Conclusions

By making changes across portfolios and working with manufacturers to create lower sodium ingredients, large companies such as Morrison are demonstrating that sodium reduction is possible. At the same time, they are helping increase the availability and affordability of lower sodium ingredients for a wider range of purchasers, including those with smaller buying power.



Buy in Bulk

For smaller purchasers, group purchasing organizations can negotiate lower prices for bulk purchases.

Taste Then Tell

Let consumers taste and like a new offering first, then tell them it's healthy!

For more information please contact

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Have a lower sodium business case story?

Email us at sodium@cdc.gov.

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