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Office of Public Affairs

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## Salt in Your Diet – Is It Too Much?

RALEIGH – A diet high in sodium increases the risk of having higher blood pressure, a major cause for heart disease and stroke. Each year, more than 21,000 people in North Carolina die from heart disease and stroke.

Approximately 25.5 percent of Americans have high blood pressure. In North Carolina, that number is 28.8 percent, and it is even higher – 39.8 percent – for African Americans.

A new study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows that more than 2 out of 3 adults are in population groups that should consume no more than 1,500 mg/day of sodium, according to the 2005 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. These groups include people with high blood pressure, African Americans, and middle-aged and older adults. Yet in 2005-2006 the estimated average sodium intake among Americans was 3,436 mg/day – more than double the recommended amount for at-risk people and well over the suggested limit for other adults of less than 2,300 mg of sodium per day.

Dr. Marcus Plescia, chief of Chronic Disease and Injury in the N.C. Division of Public Health, says that, given the high rates of heart disease and stroke in North Carolina, both individual and industry-level efforts are needed to lower the amount of sodium North Carolinians consume.

"By the year 2000, American men consumed 48 percent more salt than they did in the 1970s and women consumed 69 percent more," Plescia said. "Gradually reducing the sodium content in prepared and restaurant foods, as the food industry is doing in the United Kingdom, would result in significant health and economic benefits for everyone."

The N.C. Division of Public Health and the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services are part of a nationwide initiative started by the New York City Health Department to work with the food industry on this issue.

According to Anita Holmes, head of the Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Branch of the Division of Public Health, there are simple ways for North Carolinians to reduce their salt intake. "Seventy-seven percent of sodium in the American diet comes from processed foods, including restaurant foods and frozen or packaged foods at the grocery store. Ask that foods be prepared without added salt when eating out and read the nutrition label of foods before you buy," she said. "Eating healthy is also economical – choose low-cost fresh fruits and vegetables, and prepare more meals at home."

For more information on heart disease and stroke, visit the North Carolina Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention program website at [www.startwithyourheart.com](http://www.startwithyourheart.com). ###



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