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MINISTRY OF HEALTH - ETHIOPIA

የዜጎች ጤና ለሃገር ብልፅግና!
HEALTHIER CITIZENS FOR PROSPEROUS NATION!



Sodium Reduction Counselling Guide

A Manual for Nurses and Health Extension Workers



Introduction

This is a short guide to help nurses and health extension workers at primary health care centers provide salt reduction counselling to patients with hypertension. This guide includes notes and model scripts that may be used by the nurses/health extension workers to counsel patients to reduce salt in their diet. The nurse/health extension worker counselors should use the patient education handouts for salt reduction during counseling and provide the copy of handouts to patients.

What is dietary salt?

- Dietary salt is a combination of sodium and chloride, also known as sodium chloride (NaCl). Sodium chloride is made up of 40% sodium and 60% chloride.
- When we take excess salt, the sodium part is what is associated with health problems.

Excess salt intake and health

- The human body needs very little salt for normal body functions.
- The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that people reduce salt intake to less than 5 g/day which is equal to about a teaspoon of salt.
- Excess salt (sodium) consumption increases the risk of developing hypertension, heart disease and stroke.
- High blood pressure (also called hypertension) is a leading cause of disease, death and disability in Ethiopia, Africa, and the world.
- Reducing salt intake lowers blood pressure and reduces the risk of heart disease and stroke.
- Excess dietary salt consumption is an important and avoidable cause of high blood pressure.

Salt intake in Ethiopia

- In Ethiopia, in all regions, the average salt intake is above the WHO recommendation of 5g/day. Reducing salt intake to the levels required to maintain good health will require a collaborative effort.

What is expected from health professionals to reduce salt consumption?

- Educate the community on why and how to reduce salt intake.
- Help hypertensive patients and their families manage salt intake to help lower blood pressure.
- Advocate for salt reduction in menus served and sold at health facilities and in workplaces. health facility/workplace.

Saving Lives through Promotion of Lower Salt Consumption

How can excess salt be harmful?



Excess salt causes high blood pressure.



In Ethiopia, 1 in 6 adults have high blood pressure, which causes heart attack, stroke and kidney disease.

Recommended intake vs. current consumption



A healthy adult should consume less than 5g salt/day (< 1 levelled teaspoon).

Almost 2x 



On an average, people in Ethiopia consume twice (approximately 8.3g/ day) the recommended amount of salt.

Ways to maintain healthy blood pressure and prevent heart attack and stroke



Eat a healthy and low salt diet



Maintain a normal body weight



Avoid smoking and drinking alcohol



Exercise regularly



Take medication as directed

Nurses/health extension workers as equal partners in salt reduction

They can help:

- Create awareness about harmful health effects of excessive salt intake.
- Educate patients on ways to reduce salt consumption using various tools and practical tips.
- Identify the salt reduction approaches that will work best for patients and their families.
- Suggest appropriate dietary change(s) for patients and assist with follow-up.

Facts about salt reduction

- Most salt comes from foods prepared at home that are moderately salted. These are the foods we regularly consume in large amounts such as berbere, mitmita, daata, quanta and different types of Ethiopian spices and foods prepared with salt.
- Most people who reduce salt gradually and consistently over time stick with those changes, compared to people who try to cut back by a significant amount all at once
- Cutting salt in recipes by up to 25% (one fourth) does not change taste significantly and can go unnoticed by the consumer.

Introduce Yourself and Build Rapport

Below is a guided script with suggestions on how to talk with your patient about salt reduction. The boxes in purple are notes for your reference to talk about salt reduction with the patient. The boxes in red are example scripts you can use to ask questions and lead a conversation. Read through the steps in order to cover all of the material. However, you can refer to section headers for specific information on salt reduction strategies.

How to read the boxes



Notes for the
Nurses / HEW



Example script for Nurses
/ HEW



Greetings (Endet walachehu). My name is _____. I am here to help you understand how excess salt consumption affects the body and what is the correct amount of salt that we should eat. I will ask you some questions so that we can together identify the best ways to gradually cut down your salt intake, so that you and your family can enjoy healthier food without compromising on the taste and better manage blood pressure.

Ask the patient

After introducing yourself, start by asking these questions as a guide to understand patient's practices related to salt. You do not need to record the patient's responses. Use this information to provide specific tips.

In your home-prepared spices, is salt added to berbere, mitmita, daata etc.?

When eating your meals,

- How frequently do you sprinkle salt on food?
- How frequently do you eat berbere, mitmita, daata, "key wot", "Doro Wot" etc.?
- How often do you eat processed foods such as - potato chips, biscuits, burger etc... ?
- How often do you eat meals prepared outside the home?

Assess gaps in understanding about salt and offer information



Explain the dangers of eating excess salt.



When we eat excess salt, our body holds extra water, which raises blood pressure. The higher our blood pressure is, the greater the strain is on our heart, arteries, kidneys and brain. Excess salt intake leads to heart attack, stroke, kidney disease and dementia.

Do you have any questions about how salt affects the body?

What have you heard about the effects of high salt intake on the body?

After listening to the response, read out the information not mentioned by the patient and correct any misconception the patient has.



Almost 2x 



<5g/day
(Recommended)



8.3g/day
(Currently consumed)

Most people think they eat right amount of salt even while consuming excess salt. Therefore, it is essential to explain that research has shown Ethiopians consume almost twice the amount of salt.

Have you thought about how much salt is consumed in your family?

On average Ethiopians consume about 8.3g of salt a day which is almost about two teaspoons a day while experts recommend we should eat less than 5g a day that is around one teaspoon a day.



<5g/day



After ensuring the patient has understood the dangers of high salt consumption, explain the recommended amount of salt per day.

We should eat less than 5g of salt per day, which is about one levelled teaspoon.

Keep in mind that salt is found in many of the foods we eat in addition to the salt we add during cooking and at the table: it's found in accompaniments like berbere, mitmita, or daata, as well as in packaged foods and snack and meals we eat outside our home.

Other than the regular salt you add in your home cooking, what other food sources and spices prepared with salt do you and your family consume?

Myths about salt consumption



Myth: Lowering salt intake may lead to lower than normal blood pressure.

Fact: Eating less salt does not lead to lower than normal blood pressure. Eating less than 5g of salt per day helps to keep it in normal range.



Myth: The body needs more salt during hot seasons or while performing physical labor.

Fact: In rare cases there may be salt loss which may need immediate attention. Physical activity and sweat only remove minimal salt and the body needs more water rather than salt.



Myth: More salt is needed for children to grow well.

Fact: Children should consume less salt than adults, and excess salt is harmful to children. You can help children enjoy the low salt foods and avoid preference for salty food from a young age, which will help prevent high blood pressure in future.

Low salt consumption is good for everyone's health in the family, including those who have normal blood pressure.

Provide patient handouts and explain the tips relevant to the patient.

Here are the handouts that provide easy to adopt/practical tips on how to reduce salt in your daily diet.



Ways to Reduce Salt

WHILE COOKING

These are essential tips for the person responsible for cooking in the household. If the patient or accompanying relative is not the person responsible for cooking, you may still explain the handout; however, it may not be as effective. Request the patient to bring the person responsible for preparing food for the next counselling session.

Here are some of the tips on how to reduce salt while cooking. The most effective way to reduce salt is by using less salt while preparing food.



Ask the patient "How long does 1 kg of salt last in your home?" and suggest to extend the duration of using the same 1 kg of salt by another two weeks.

If the patient responds 'I don't know', ask the patient to track next time they buy salt. For counselling, use the example of the six weeks as in the box below.

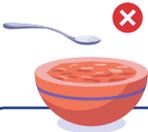
You may observe the amount of salt consumed by keeping track of the number of days a packet of salt lasts. For example, if one pack lasts for six weeks; try to push it to eight weeks.

The reduction will not happen immediately. You may try to make it last for an additional five days first and later add another five days and so on.



Research shows that salt can be reduced gradually over time, and our taste buds will get used to decreasing levels of salt.

Slowly and gradually, start reducing the salt added to key wot, doro wot and other main preparations of the meal. A small reduction will not be noticeable. Do it for a week or two, then reduce little more and so on.



A large portion of salt in our diet comes from the spices like berbere, mitmita, daata, and from stew such as key wot, doro wot and others. If we avoid adding salt to these foods, then a considerable amount of salt can be reduced without much change in the taste.

One of the best ways to reduce salt is not to add to "key wot" since most berbere contain salt !



It is possible to reduce salt in spices such as berbere, mitmita, daata (other local examples). Therefore, recommend to prepare foods with these spices add less salt or none at all. Instead you can use other spices such as garlic, ginger, rosemary, and cardamom ("korerima")

Premade spices such as berbere, mitmita, and data, etc. are often high in salt. The more they are used, the more likely to be consumed. Therefore, use these spices in smaller quantity and less frequently.

E.g. If you make "key wot" seven days a week, make it twice a week and try to reduce the quantity as well. If you prepare your own spices, don't add salt to the mixture or try gradually reducing the amount of salt you add.

Which one of these tips you would like to start today?



Ways to Reduce Salt

AT THE TABLE

Patients may take a few conscious steps while eating food to avoid extra salt.



Here are some of the tips on how to reduce salt during meals and snack times.



For some foods, saltiness is one of their main characteristics. It is difficult to reduce salt in these foods. Some examples are awaze, salty "quanta" and daata. It is recommended to eat these foods in smaller quantities and less frequently.

The reduction of salt in already prepared commercial spices is difficult, hence use in small amounts and less frequently.



It is difficult to control the quantity of salt added from salt shakers/finger pinches while eating food. Also, it's easy to assume food already has little or no salt and then add additional salt without tasting the food.

Try to avoid adding salt to the foods which are already prepared and served. Taste a couple of bites of the food first. Only add salt if needed. Salt shakers and salty spices should be removed from the tables!

Ways to Reduce Salt

SHOP SMART

These are essential tips to buy low salt alternatives and avoiding high salt foods while shopping.

I will give you some tips to reduce salt in your diet by making smart choices while shopping



Many instant foods such as noodles (Indomin) and commercial potato chips (sun chips) are high on salt. They use salt as a preservative and taste enhancer.

One way to shop smart is to know which foods are likely to have high salt and avoid or limit them. Most instant foods such as noodles(indomin) and potato chips(sun-chips), dried quanta with salt are usually high in salt.

Another way, is to find alternatives to salted foods. For example, using foods with local spices with no salts such as Garlic, Rosemary, ginger, cardamom ("Korerima").

Finally, buy fresh fruits and vegetables as they are usually low in sodium and contain other nutrients like potassium, vitamins, minerals, fibre, etc.



Regular salt contains sodium chloride. The sodium part of the salt is harmful as it causes high blood pressure and heart disease. In some shops and markets, low sodium salt is available. In low sodium salts, a portion of the sodium is replaced by potassium. These salts taste and look similar to regular salt.

Ask patient whether s/he or a family member have kidney disease other than stones. If patient answers affirmatively, do not recommend low sodium salt.

Low sodium salts reduce the harmful part of the salt, which is sodium, by adding some potassium. These low sodium salts are available in some shops and markets - ask your shopkeeper if they can stock low sodium salt.

However, low sodium salts are not recommended for those with kidney disease. Do you or any of your family members have kidney disease, other than stones?



The packaged/unpackaged processed foods such as chips, biscuits, etc. are typically consumed as snacks and are generally very high in salt. Therefore, such processed foods should be purchased and consumed infrequently.

If processed foods are purchased less often, they are consumed less. If you consume them frequently, then it is harmful. So, while shopping, limit the purchase of snacks and savoury foods including ready-to-eat foods such as potato chips, biscuits, etc. Fresh fruits and salads are healthier alternatives to these snacks.

What's something you will try next time you go shopping?



Ways to Reduce Salt

OUTSIDE HOME (RESTAURANTS, STREET FOOD)

Ask the patient how many times a week is the meal prepared outside the home. These could be meals at hostels, restaurants, kiosks, street food, canteen, etc. If they eat most of their meals outside, then they have little control over how the food is prepared and less idea of its salt content. This handout is for those individuals who take at least one meal a day outside their home.

These are the tips if you eat your meals outside home.



Typically, meals prepared outside the home have more salt in the dishes to make them more palatable. Foods that are not freshly prepared are likely to have high salt.

If you go to a regular place for meals then request that your meals be prepared with less salt. It is better to consume less salted food than high salted food.



The ready-to-eat snacks available outside home like sambusa, chips, etc. are popular snack items and easy meal replacements. These are generally very high in salt and should be avoided.

Avoid regular consumption of foods such as chips, sambusa etc., as they have excessive salt.

Food items such as potato chips, sambosa, different sandwiches "erteb" are usually high in salt. It is advisable to reduce the quantity and frequency of consumption.

For example, if you eat fast food on a daily basis, reduce eating fast food to only once a week.



Most food outlets invariably add food accompaniments such as ketchup, table salt, mitmita to meals or keep these condiments on the table.

Request the restaurant not to provide food accompaniments such as ketchup, table salt, and mitmita etc. along with your meals. If you have no control over that, avoid or limit their use in your regular meals.

When you go for outside food, which tip will you try?



Support and Encourage

Work with the patient to identify and commit to a salt reduction approach

I hope after going through these materials, you may have understood that there are many ways to go about salt reduction. It may seem overwhelming to try these new tips all at once. Try choosing one or two new suggestions to try. Most people achieve success when they focus on taking small steps.

What are the one or two things that we have discussed today will you be able to follow?

How confident are you that you could follow these tips?

What would help you to be successful in adopting these tips?



Encourage patients to make their selected dietary change(s) and follow-up with them

Gradually reducing your salt intake will enable a smooth transition to eating less salty food without even realizing it. Many patients are successful when they make small changes.

One by one, these new ways of shopping, cooking and eating will become habits and help you to achieve the recommended limit of less than 5g/day of salt.

I look forward to hearing from you, on how you have started including these tips in your lifestyle when you come for your next follow-up visit. You can do it!! All the very best!



