

NCCDPHP Success Story

Hands-on Culinary Class Helps to Reduce Sodium in College and Preschool Meals

By Roseanne Jones

Public Health Challenge

Americans eat processed foods or meals away from home about 5 times per week, and these foods contribute to 77% of our total sodium intake. The average sodium consumed per day (3,400 mg) is 1½ times the 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommended limit of 2,300 mg. According to the 2016 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, nearly one-third of Onondaga County, New York residents had high blood pressure, a major risk factor for heart disease and stroke. Heart Disease is the leading cause of death in Onondaga County (139.9 per 100,000) and stroke is the fifth leading cause (30.9 per 100,000), according to 2018 National Vital Statistics System data. Eating less sodium can prevent and lower high blood pressure. Educating food service staff about buying lower-sodium products and using healthier preparation methods can help consumers reduce the amount of sodium they consume.

Approach

Onondaga County Health Department's Sodium Reduction in Communities Program (SRCP) collaborated with Chef William Collins, a culinary specialist who teaches at Syracuse University, to show participants easy ways to reduce sodium in menus. Thirty participants included foodservice staff from partnering early care and education centers, universities and colleges. Chef Collins led them through interactive, hands-on strategies to reduce sodium in recipes: the addition method, diluting sodium in prepared foods by adding sodium-free ingredients; buying lower-sodium products; reducing serving sizes; and increasing the use of garlic, onions, herbs, spices, citrus, and vinegars.



At A Glance

Partnering with early care and education centers, universities, and colleges, the Onondaga County Health Department engaged food service management, staff, chefs, and dietitians in an interactive, hands-on, chef-led training to demonstrate ways to decrease sodium in recipes that are regularly offered in their cafeterias. Within 1 year following the training, 100% of partnering sites changed to lower sodium products and/or had altered all of their recipes for their daily meal services to be lower in sodium using the techniques they learned.

"We are lowering sodium by changing some of the sauces in our recipes. If we start children young enough they will get more used to lower-sodium food and they'll be more likely to choose them when they get older."

- Jill Hayes, Registered Dietitian

Results

100% of attendees said they would alter their food preparation based on the training, 50% said they would read labels to identify sodium content of ingredients, and 70% said they would use Chef Collins' techniques to reduce sodium in their recipes. One year following the training, 62 products have been replaced with lower-sodium products, like canned tomato products. Seventy recipes have been updated by adding lower-sodium, sodium-free, or other fresh ingredients or by decreasing portion sizes. Before the training, the average sodium in products was 324 mg per serving, and after the training the average was 124 mg sodium per serving, a 61% relative decrease. Sodium decreased by as much as 95% in some menu items. "Now we look at all of our menu items to see if there are low-sodium options available from our distributor," one partner said.

What's Next

The initiative's goal is to decrease sodium in menus by having our partners buy lower-sodium products and alter recipes to reduce sodium. One product change, like substituting lower-sodium for regular tomato sauce, can impact many recipes. Training staff in new food preparation and procurement methods is an ongoing process. Since the training, Chef Collins has worked with individual sites on recipe makeovers for a few of their staple menu items. Our next effort is to train partners on the use of herbs and spices, especially for traditional foods from other cultures. We continue to work with our partners by recommending new products and suggesting alterations in recipes. Revising recipes can help sustain sodium reduction efforts.

Find Out More

Incorporating the participation of a locally respected chef with knowledge of nutrition guidelines and healthy eating recommendations can bring interest and credibility to sodium reduction trainings for food service staff. To learn more about Onondaga County's sodium reduction work, visit <https://healthyliving.ongov.net/healthy-foods/>. This project is supported by CDC's Cooperative Agreement DP16-1607 and the NY State Department of Health Sodium Reduction in Communities Program.

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Web site

<http://nccd.cdc.gov/nccdsuccessstories/>

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