

SODIUM REDUCTION | New York NYC Healthy Hospital Food Initiative

August 2014



Problem

A total of 27.8% of adult residents in New York City (NYC) have high blood pressure, a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease—the leading cause of death in NYC. Diets high in sodium can increase blood pressure and are particularly dangerous for people who already have high blood pressure.

Project

The NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene developed the Healthy Hospital Food Initiative (HHFI) to encourage hospitals to offer healthier food and beverages. Participating hospitals adopt standards to improve the nutritional content of items offered in cafeterias, vending machines, and patient meals.

Outcomes

More than half of NYC hospitals are participating in HHFI, affecting more than 125,000 employees and millions of visitors annually. Many hospitals are changing the ways they prepare food to reduce sodium content.

www.cdc.gov

Statement of Problem

In New York City (NYC), 56% of residents are overweight or obese, 1 in 10 adult residents has diabetes, and more than 16,700 people died in 2012 from cardiovascular disease (CVD). Improving nutrition can decrease risk for CVD—the leading cause of death in NYC and the United States—as well as diabetes, obesity, and other serious illnesses.

Specifically, diets high in sodium can increase blood pressure, a major risk factor for CVD. Almost 80% of the sodium in the American diet comes from packaged and prepared foods. A high-sodium diet is particularly dangerous for people who already have high blood pressure, also known as hypertension, which affects 27.8% of adult NYC residents. The city's rate is consistent with the rate of hypertension nationally.

Hospital cafeterias often offer a range of unhealthy foods, including many high in sodium. Hospitals can play a critical role in increasing access to healthy choices by providing healthier food and beverages in their retail settings, particularly cafeterias that serve visitors and staff.

Project Description

In 2010, the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene developed the Healthy Hospital Food Initiative (HHFI), which aims to create a healthier food environment in NYC hospitals. Facilities participate by adopting the evidence-based NYC Food Standards to improve the nutritional content of food and beverages offered in cafeterias, vending machines, and patient meals.

With support from CDC's Sodium Reduction in Communities Program, the health department developed and put into action new Standards for Cafeterias/Cafes, which complement the existing Standards for Food Vending Machines, Beverage Vending Machines, and Patient Meals. The Standards for Cafeterias/Cafes promote offering fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, along with labeling calories and limiting portion sizes, sugary drinks, and fried foods. Five of the 20 standards directly target sodium reduction by limiting the amount of sodium allowed in certain foods. Additional standards promote a low-sodium diet by encouraging food and beverage options naturally low in sodium, like water and fresh produce. Standards addressing portion control also help reduce sodium consumption.



Hospitals can play a critical role in increasing access to healthy choices by providing healthier food and beverages in their retail settings, particularly cafeterias that serve visitors and staff.

Resources

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Salt www.cdc.gov/salt
- New York City: Healthy Hospital Food Initiative www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/living/cardio-hospital-food-initiative.shtml

For more information please contact Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

1600 Clifton Road NE, Atlanta, GA 30333

Telephone: 1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636)/

TTY: 1-888-232-6348

E-mail: cdcinfo@cdc.gov

www.cdc.gov

Outcomes

The health department is working with 37 hospitals—more than half of the hospitals in NYC—as part of HHFI. Changes in these hospitals will affect more than 125,000 employees and millions of visitors annually. To date, 20 of these hospital partners are working to implement the Standards for Cafeterias/Cafes, and 6 have implemented all four sets of standards. To target sodium reduction, the hospitals are purchasing lower-sodium products, such as fresh, frozen, and dried beans and vegetables; lower-sodium deli meats; and lower-sodium or “no salt added” canned food. Additionally, hospitals have reduced the amount of salt used in recipes and are cooking more menu items on-site to allow for greater control of salt use.

To aid hospitals implementing the Standards for Cafeterias/Cafes, the health department created an implementation guide that provides additional explanation and tips for meeting each standard. Any organization looking to make healthful changes to its cafeteria or cafe can access the guide on the [NYC HHFI Web site](#).

Five of the 20 Standards for Cafeterias/Cafes directly target sodium reduction by requiring that

- At least half of all sandwiches, salads, and entrees offered contain 800 milligrams (mg) of sodium or less.
- All soups contain 480 mg of sodium or less per 8 ounces.
- At least one steamed, baked, or grilled vegetable option be available daily and contain 200 mg of sodium or less per serving.
- All prepackaged snacks contain no more than 200 calories, 200 mg of sodium, 7 grams (g) of fat, 2 g of saturated fat, and 10 g of sugar per package.
- If a value meal is offered, one option contains no more than 650 calories and 800 mg of sodium.

Conclusions

Hospitals participating in HHFI have demonstrated that implementing the NYC Food Standards, particularly the Standards for Cafeterias/Cafes, can reduce access to high-sodium foods and improve the overall hospital food retail environment. Food service directors have mentioned that customers are generally pleased with the changes to the cafeteria and appreciate having healthier food options and greater access to lower-sodium menu items.