



A salt is a deadly weapon

For the most part, we take in way too much sodium. And it's killing us. Experts tell us it's time to cut back.

Johanna Weidner

WATERLOO REGION — It's an addiction that hooks everyone. People savour a fix a few times every day, often without even knowing it.

Too much can be deadly, yet it's in every home — salt.

"Salt is an addiction just like alcohol and cigarettes," said Gary Wallace, who had to kick his serious salt habit after a heart transplant.

"Before this started, I loved salt."

The routine was the same every time he sat down at the dining room table: "I didn't taste anything. The first thing I reached for was the salt shaker."

For those in doubt about salt's sure grip, try quitting cold turkey. The body goes into withdrawal, the craving for salt so strong nothing tastes right.

"Foods will taste very, very bland," said Janice Holley, a registered dietitian in St. Mary's General Hospital's cardiac rehab and cardiology program.

It takes a few weeks for taste buds to adjust to the natural flavour of foods after switching to a lower salt diet. Then, like a former smoker who can't stand the smell of cigarettes, salt no longer appeals.

"You don't like it, you have that sort of very quick intolerance," Holley said.

Canadians consume more than double the daily recommended amount of sodium.

The guideline is less than 2,300 milligrams a day, with 1,500 mg be-

ing more than adequate. Most people get between 3,000 and 5,000 mg or even more.

A teaspoon of salt is 2,000 mg.

Awareness about salt intake and its link to serious health problems including heart disease, stroke and kidney disease is the focus of a free public talk St. Mary's is hosting at the end of February, which is Heart Month.

Surprisingly, only about 10 to 15 per cent of sodium a person consumes is sprinkled on food during cooking and at the table.

"What we add is relatively small," Holley said.

Most sodium — about 75 per cent — comes from packaged and prepared foods. Between 10 and 15 per cent is naturally found in food.

Reading nutrition labels is an eye-opening experience, Holley said, because salt lurks in unexpected places and at amazingly high levels.

The goal should be 200 mg or less sodium per serving. Between 200 to 400 mg is a medium to high sodium level, and 400 mg or more is high sodium.

Yet many foods are way above that high threshold. Frozen meals are often upwards of 800 mg. Dry soup mix can hit 2,000 mg.

Many products that seem above suspicion have loads of salt, which is used for taste and as a preservative.

Reducing salt can be frustrating and takes planning in the form of cooking healthier meals rather than relying on processed food.

➤ SEE SALT ON PAGE B3



M Did you know a single teaspoon of salt has about 2,000 mg of sodium, about as much as we should have in an entire day? Find more salt facts at GuelphMercury.com

The number on the scale only a small part of the whole story

Do you believe that by reaching your ideal weight you will automatically be healthy and fit?

Sure the scale may say that you are at a healthy weight for your body type, but how you look on the outside doesn't necessarily reflect what is happening on the inside. You could be a *skinny fat person*.

Taking off excess weight is so important for optimum health, but, if not done properly, you can still be obese on the inside. Actually, it is more important how you reach that ideal weight that really matters. Even if you have never had a weight issue and are one of the lucky few who are genetically blessed with a great metabolism, your weight is not the sole indicator of health.

An ideal weight alone does not equal fitness. Think about it... we all know someone who is thin but not "fit" or "healthy."

The world is full of skinny fat people. When talking about overall fitness and health, what matters is the percentage of body fat we have. It is possible for a thin



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person to have a high percentage of body fat. It is also possible for a thin person to be out of shape.

Let's take two people, same gender, same height, and same age, both at their ideal weight. Person A never works out, doesn't watch what they eat and is 139 pounds and with 32 per cent body fat. Person B works out regularly by walking and doing resistance training, as well as eating a healthy diet. Person B is 145 pounds with a lean 20 per cent body fat. Both individuals may look the same, but Person A is at a higher risk of health-related issues.

Being truly fit isn't measured by the numbers on the scale. Some people who are

thin still suffer from high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes and other issues often associated with excess weight. The only path to true fitness and a healthy body-fat percentage is through regular exercise of both cardio and resistance training, along with proper nutrition.

Many people focus on losing weight any way they can. They follow a very restrictive low-calorie diet combined with extreme amounts of cardio training. Whenever you consistently don't eat enough calories to sustain your body's need for energy and nutrients, your body will believe that its energy intake will always be that low, and it will go into starvation mode. In essence, it will hold onto body fat because body fat is a long-term energy source, and it will defend itself from further energy needs by destroying muscle tissue, and using that tissue for energy.

The muscles in your body are what use the majority of the calories you ingest. They are the furnace that cranks up your metabo-

lism, and for every pound of muscle tissue you have, your body needs to feed that muscle tissue just to keep it alive. On the scale, this all looks well and good. Muscle weighs significantly more than fat does, so while you starve your body, the number on the scale drops, but your body fat isn't going anywhere.

Although the number on your scale is lower, you look unhealthy and will have to continue to deprive your body to maintain that low weight. The scale alone does not give you enough information.

Find out your body fat. There is an old saying, "you can't judge a book by its cover." This is so true when it relates to our bodies. Why not have both health and beauty inside and out!

Guelph-based personal trainer Marla Arndt owns and operates Frameworks Fitness Studio. She can be reached via her website at www.frameworksfitness.com. Her column appears every other week.

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