



FDA Issues New Sodium-Reduction Goals for Food Manufacturers to Combat Chronic Diseases

By Megan Edwards
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On October 13, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) [released new guidance](#) for food manufacturers, chain restaurants, and food service operators on reducing the amount of sodium in [processed](#), packaged, and prepared foods by 12 percent over the next two and half years. While the new guidelines are voluntary, this push for sodium reduction among large food providers comes as part of a larger effort to address chronic diseases through improved nutrition.

The guidelines recommend a short-term target of decreasing average sodium intake from 3,400 mg per day (the average for most Americans) to 3,000 mg per day. [The Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) recommends an upper limit of 2,300 mg of sodium per day.

“Research shows that people consume 50 percent more sodium than recommended,” explained Acting FDA Commissioner Janet Woodcock, M.D. “Although many consumers may want to reduce their sodium intake, about 70 percent of the sodium we eat comes from packaged, processed, and restaurant foods, making it challenging to limit sodium. Changes across the overall food supply will make it easier to access lower-sodium options and reduce intake even in the absence of behavior change.”

The 23-page [guideline document](#) outlines several key principles for food providers to take into consideration while adopting the new goals, including:

- Sodium levels should be gradually reduced to allow time for product reformulation.
- Sodium reduction should progress at a pace that allows consumer preferences and expectations for saltiness in foods to adjust gradually over time.
- Reduction in sodium levels should not lead to product reformulation that negatively impacts the nutritional quality of the foods by modifying other nutrient levels (like increasing [added sugars](#) or [saturated fat](#) content).

Woodcock pointed out that while tackling chronic disease in the United States is beneficial for the entire population, it’s particularly crucial for marginalized communities who experience increased risks of life-threatening health issues.

“Limiting certain nutrients, such as sodium, in our diets plays a crucial role in preventing diseases like hypertension and cardiovascular disease that disproportionately impact racial and ethnic minority groups,” she said. “These diseases often result in hundreds of thousands of lives lost and billions in annual health care costs. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has only amplified these health disparities and the need for improved nutrition, as people with cardiovascular disease and other underlying conditions are at increased risk for severe outcomes from COVID-19.”