Some patients with pulmonary hypertension are asked to restrict their sodium and fluid intake, especially those patients who have less than normal pumping ability of the right side of the heart. Excess sodium and fluid can lead to excess body fluid, putting a strain on the heart.

**Sodium Restriction:**

Too much sodium can cause the body to retain fluid, leading to swelling in the legs (what healthcare providers call edema). Fluid can also accumulate in the abdomen causing a feeling of bloating. This can cause weight gain and increased shortness of breath. To manage these conditions, some patients will be asked to restrict their total sodium intake to 2 grams a day, which is 2,000 milligrams. Here are some ways to cut back on sodium:

- Table salt has a large amount of sodium. It is often used during cooking or may be added to food at the table. Table salt is about one-half sodium, so when on a low sodium diet it’s best to eliminate it completely. Consider taking the salt shaker off the table.

- The amount of sodium is listed in milligrams on the nutrition label of most foods. As a general rule for 2 gram sodium diets, purchase products with no more than 200 mg of sodium per serving. You should avoid fast food restaurants because these foods tend to be very high in sodium. When eating out at restaurants, ask that no salt be used in preparing your food.

- Do not use salt substitutes without consulting with your health care provider because some of these contain a large amount of potassium which can cause your potassium level to get too high. Spices or herbs are generally a good alternative to salt.

- Avoid high sodium foods such as soups (canned and dry mixes), meats (sausage, bacon, ham, deli meats, hot dogs) and salty snacks such as chips or pretzels, salted nuts, pickles, olives, fast foods, frozen dinners.

- Try lower sodium choices, including fresh fruits and vegetables, lemon juice, herbes, pepper, garlic or vinegar for seasonings, foods labeled as “low salt” or “low sodium,” canned vegetables with “no salt added” on the label, plain brown or white rice and fresh lean meats, fish and poultry.

**Fluid Restriction:**

Restricting fluids can help avoid or decrease swelling or fluid retention. Often patients are placed on a two liter fluid restriction. Keep these tips in mind:

- Measure the amount of fluid you are drinking every day, at least for the first few weeks. Two liters of fluid equals 8.6 cups. Remember to count the water you take with your pills. Soups, sherbet, and popsicles are also counted as fluids. A cup of ice is usually counted as ½ cup of water.

- Weight gain is often one of the first signs that you are retaining fluid. Weigh yourself daily. If you gain 2-3 pounds in a day, or if it continues for two or more days, call your health care provider.