



Balancing Sodium and Fluid Intake

2018 PHA on the Road – Long Beach, Calif.

Session Description

It is critically important for PH patients to take an active role in managing nutrition and eating habits. A well-balanced diet, sometimes with special attention to salt and fluid restrictions, is essential to maintaining health, improving symptoms and living your best life with PH. Panelists will review common dietary pitfalls, foods to avoid and how to limit fluid intake. In addition, they will share dietary and lifestyle strategies to ensure long-term success.

Learning Objectives

At the end of the session attendees will be able to:

- Understand the impact of sodium, fluids and excess calories in PH.
- Realize how a balanced diet can improve overall health and help achieve PH treatment goals.
- Familiarize themselves with better alternatives to foods that commonly are high in sodium.
- Develop real-world strategies for healthy eating that fit your lifestyle and budget.

Salt and Water: The Basics

Patients with PH should avoid high sodium foods and be aware of total daily sodium intake; most patients should limit sodium to 2,000 milligrams (mg) per day; some PH patients might need to set a lower goal.

- The body regulates its fluid balance based on both salt concentration and water content in the blood; salt in your body acts like a sponge holding onto water and increased water/fluid retention makes your heart work harder.
- Fluid retention causes weight gain and can lead to leg swelling and/or abdominal swelling; excess fluid puts further strain on your heart and causes increased shortness of breath or fatigue.
- Although we often hear that it is good to drink a lot of fluids, with PH, you should try to resist quenching your thirst with more water/fluids, even if you feel thirsty; at some point, you will begin to retain water, which can lead to an emergency room visit.

Managing Your Sodium Restrictions

- Table salt is the most common source of sodium in our diet; most table salts are a combination of sodium and chloride; one teaspoon of salt has 2,000 mg of sodium.
 - Sodium occurs naturally in foods; unsalted, unprocessed foods: fresh fruits, vegetables, meats and rice often have low sodium content; most foods in your diet should come from this group.
 - ⊖ A great amount of sodium people consume comes from processed and restaurant foods; processed foods have large amounts of sodium, including frozen dinners, lunch meats and many canned items like soups.
 - Some medicines include added sodium, such as Alka-Seltzer and other dissolvable tablets.
- Read and compare food labels carefully to understand how much salt is in each serving.

Managing Your Fluid Intake

- If you are retaining water, your doctor may instruct you to further reduce all fluid consumption.
- Your doctor may also tell you to cut back on sodium, which means no added salt; consider salt substitutes, but beware as they contain potassium; if you have high potassium and/or kidney failure, these problems can worsen with salt substitutes.

- If you are taking a diuretic (water pill) like furosemide (Lasix®), it usually means your doctor has determined that you are retaining fluid; water pills can make you thirsty, but avoid fluids and instead try sugarless gum, candy, ice chips, etc.
- Remember that when taking diuretics, you should:
 - Weigh yourself and record your weight every morning after emptying your bladder, using the same scale each time; if your weight changes by more than two pounds (up or down) per day, or four pounds per week, contact your PH clinic.
 - Bring your daily weight record to your doctor’s and/or nurse’s visits.
 - Fluid retention can show up anywhere, not only in your arms or legs; some people accumulate fluid in their abdomens, causing loss of appetite or feeling bloated, nausea or becoming full quickly when eating.
 - Potassium pills may be necessary because water pills can deplete potassium from your body, causing muscle cramps and irregular heartbeats; if your potassium gets severely low, it can cause you to be hospitalized and can even be life threatening.
 - If you get sick and stop eating or drinking, you may need to temporarily lower your water pill dose or even stop taking it until you recover; notify your physician if this happens.
- Restrict fluids to two liters per day (2 liters = 2 quarts = 68 oz. = approx. eight 8 oz. glasses).
 - Fluid restriction includes any liquids: water, coffee, soda, soup, milk, etc.; if the item is sold as a liquid measure—such as a gallon or in ounces—consider it a liquid (e.g., ice cream).

Takeaway Messages

- Good eating habits and proper fluid balance are important for keeping your heart healthy.
- Take responsibility for your nutrition; get into the habit of reading food labels, weighing yourself every day and recording your weight.
- Minimize processed foods; if you don’t know how much sodium and/or calories are in a meal, you should not eat it.
- If you are prescribed water pills, be careful about becoming dehydrated, but do not jump to the conclusion that you are dehydrated just because you are thirsty.
- Know when to call your PH doctor to report early signs of rapid weight changes.

Comparison of Two Breakfast Cereal Nutrition Labels

