



## THE HEALTHY CHINESE TAKE-OUT INITIATIVE

### PHILADELPHIA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

#### Million Hearts in Action

[ Strategies for Achieving Million Hearts Goals ]



Too much sodium can lead to hypertension, or high blood pressure, which increases the risk of heart disease and stroke. More than one-third of Philadelphia adults have high blood pressure, the highest prevalence among the 10 largest counties in the U.S. The city also has a large number of Chinese take-out restaurants, which are known for high salt dishes, and are concentrated primarily in low-income and minority pockets of the city. So, the city worked with a coalition of community, health and business organizations to tackle the issue, and the [Philadelphia Healthy Chinese Take-Out Initiative](#) was born.

#### [ Fast Facts ]

- Nearly half of Philadelphia's African-American population has high blood pressure.
- Of the estimated 437 Chinese take-out restaurants in Philadelphia, the majority are in low-income African-American and Hispanic communities. Many of these neighborhoods don't have easy access to fresh food at grocers or corner stores, so these take-out restaurants become a major point of food access.
- The city's Get Healthy Philly initiative partnered in 2012 with Temple University's Center for Asian Health, the Asian Community Health Coalition and the Greater Philadelphia Chinese Restaurant Association on the Healthy Chinese Take-out Initiative.

#### [ What We Did ]

- We worked with project partners to identify and recruit restaurants. To be eligible, restaurants had to have Chinese owners or chefs, be take-out only, and be located in high-poverty zip codes with large African American or Hispanic populations. Of 437 Chinese take-out restaurants in Philadelphia, 300 were recruited to participate in the initiative; 221 restaurants completed the formative evaluation and, ultimately, 206 participated in cooking trainings. After two years, 181 restaurants remained enrolled.
- We conducted an assessment of owner/chef knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to salt use and consumption.
- We held low sodium cooking trainings, led by a chef from the Culinary Institute of America in New York who specialized in low-sodium Asian cooking. Some strategies taught in the training included using less sauce, using lower sodium ingredients, using fresh vegetables instead of canned, using more spices such as chilies, ginger and garlic to compensate for less salt; and decreasing the number of soy sauce packets distributed with an order. Initially, three high-sodium dishes were selected for reduction: Chicken Lo Mein, Shrimp & Broccoli and General Tso's Chicken.
- We distributed low sodium cooking materials - including low sodium recipes, toolkits, and measuring spoons during one-on-one visits with restaurants.





- We held on-site compliance checks and booster trainings to monitor sodium reduction strategies and provide ongoing technical assistance.
- We conducted customer taste tests and assessed the sodium content of meals at baseline and at 6, 16, and 24 months post training with blind sampling at a subset of restaurants.

## [ What We Accomplished ]

- After the first round of compliance checks, all participating restaurants implemented at least one sodium reduction strategy.
- Over 24 months, significant reductions in sodium content were seen in the three sampled dishes, ranging from 13 percent to 34 percent.
- The Chicken Lo Mein and General Tso's Chicken dishes saw the largest reductions during the first 6 months after the cooking training and improved more over an additional 18 months.
- For all three dishes, total sodium content at 24 months was below daily dietary sodium guidelines.



**This is what Get Healthy Philly is all about, bringing healthier options to the neighborhood, where people live, work, shop, learn and play. We want healthy food to be accessible to everyone no matter where you are.”**

*- Jennifer Aquilante, Healthy Food Access Coordinator for Get Healthy Philly*

## [ What We Learned ]

- Most owners/chefs were willing and able to reduce the sodium in meals but desired training in food preparation, procurement, and marketing of lower sodium options.
- A strong partnership with the Greater Philadelphia Chinese Restaurant Association helped garner buy-in and participation from the restaurant owners.
- Training was a key to the initiative's success, and it was important to have a professional chef the owners could relate to.
- Follow-up, more often initially and then at least annually, is important to track and sustain changes over time.
- Taste tests helped get the customers' perspective.
- There is no set strategy that works for every restaurant, so promoting alternative strategies and gradual changes helps long-time customers who might notice even small changes get used to new recipes.



## [ What We Are Doing Now ]

Now that restaurant owners are maintaining their sodium reductions, the initiative plans to continue working on outreach and education to customers about low sodium options. Temple University's Center for Asian Health is partnering with prominent church leaders to provide trainings to the church community about sodium and its impact on health, and about the lower sodium options available at Chinese take-outs. We also are identifying opportunities to connect with other sodium reduction initiatives, including cross-dissemination of materials from the city's sodium reduction media initiative "Reduce the salt. Reclaim your health."

**Get Healthy Philly Initiative Philadelphia Department of Public Health**

<http://www.phila.gov/health/chronicdisease/gethealthyphilly.html>

[www.foodfitphilly.org](http://www.foodfitphilly.org)

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