**Question:**
What is the difference in the sodium potassium ratio between processed fast food versus whole foods prepared in a healthy manner?

**Answer: Let's compare:**

**Menu 1: Fast Food Meal**
- McDonald’s Big Mac
- Medium Fries
- Medium cola drink
1130 calories, 48 g fat, 13 g saturated fat, 1.5 g trans fat, 75 mg cholesterol, 1325 mg sodium, 151 g carbohydrate, 8 g fiber, 29 g protein, 1051 mg potassium

**Sodium/potassium ratio: 1.26**
*There is more sodium than potassium here which is bad news for your heart!*

**Menu 2: Healthy Home-Cooked Meal**
- Salad with vinegar
- Poached Salmon with ginger
- Baked potato
- Tea, unsweetened
372 calories, 7.5 g fat, 1 g saturated fat, 0 g trans fat, 60 mg cholesterol, 81 mg sodium, 47 g carbohydrate, 8 g fiber, 28 g protein, 2017 mg potassium

**Sodium/potassium ratio: .04**
*There is a lot more potassium than sodium here which is very good news!*

**How to lower sodium:**
- **Start reading nutrition facts labels** and choose foods that have 5% of the daily value or less for sodium.
- **Avoid high-sodium food:** fast food, frozen food, processed meats, picked foods, processed grains, cheese, canned foods with added salt and most processed and fast foods.
- Remember, 90% of the sodium you eat comes from salt and 75% of that comes from processed foods and foods eaten away from home.

**How to increase potassium:**
- Get enough fruits and vegetables
- Choose fresh meat, poultry and fish items that are made without added salt. Include plenty of nuts and legumes (dried beans).
- Some superstars (>500 mg potassium) include: apricots, bananas, lowfat yogurt, kidney beans, lima beans, white beans, beet greens, black-eyed peas, lentils, winter squash, spinach, potatoes, sweet potatoes, melon, raisins, avocados, dates, figs and carrot juice.

Fortunately these strategies are almost one and the same. If you choose lower-sodium, whole foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grains that are low in sodium, beans/legumes, unprocessed meats and lowfat dairy you will get more potassium and displace high-sodium processed foods from your diet.

A recent study found a strong correlation between poor sodium to potassium ratios (1.46 to 2.15) and mortality! (*Arch Intern Med.* 2011;171[13]:1183-1191)

A study published in *Circulation* found the average sodium to potassium ratio in the American diet was about 2.0 which is high. Researchers found that a 10% reduction in sodium and a 10% increase in potassium can decrease blood pressure by 2 to 4 mmHg. (*Circulation* 77, No. 1, 53-61, 1988.)