

Hold the Salt

In 1997, 63-year-old **Donald A. Gazzaniga '56** collapsed while rowing. He was diagnosed with congestive heart failure, serious enough to cause his cardiologist to “work him up” for a heart transplant. He was given about six months’ time, so “I put everything in order,” he says. While on the waiting list for a transplant – his only hope for survival – he was advised by his doctor to keep his sodium intake under 1500-2000 mg. per day.

Gazzaniga had other ideas, however. He set out to consume just 500 mg. of salt a day or even less. No easy feat when you consider that your daily breakfast cereal alone can have double that amount and that the average American ingests 8000 mg. per day. His doctor told him that no one had ever succeeded in getting below 1500 mg. a day.

BUT WHEN GAZZANIGA went to the local bookstore he couldn’t find a single “no-salt” cookbook that met his stringent needs. He was undeterred, however. “In my case, I had no choice,” he says. “Salt had to drastically be reduced in my diet – or else.”

A businessman with experience in the publishing, entertainment and aircraft industries, Gazzaniga was also an amateur cook. He vowed to create a diet

that would not only lower his salt intake to the virtually impossible level of 500 mg. per day, but would still be tasty and broad-based.

Thus began his odyssey. He achieved the miniscule 500 mg. mark almost immediately, baking his own bread with lowest-sodium baking powder, buying no-salt canned goods and giving up cream and soy sauce. At the six-month date for his “departure from terra firma,” as he puts it, he was still going – and getting better. After two years, he was walking up to seven miles a day, exercising on his stationary bike and fishing. In 1999, he trekked to the top of Glacier National Park, something that cardiologists say is impossible for a congestive heart failure patient unless his condition has been significantly reversed.

By then he’d collected more than 350 recipes and built a complete 28-day meal planner with the help of his eldest daughter, Jeannie, a registered dietician with a doctorate in the field. The compendium of delicious recipes and meal planner designed to combat heart failure and dan-

gerous hypertension resulted in the *No Salt Lowest Sodium Cookbook*, recently published by St. Martin’s Press. The meal planning guide never exceeds the 500 mg. target level and often provides as few as 285 mg. a day. That’s 75 percent less than any other low-salt cookbook provides – including that published by the American Heart Association.

Gazzaniga has already received rave reviews of his 28-day plan from readers and visitors to his website (www.megaheart.com) whose improvement has seemed miraculous to them. “I need all the help I can get keeping my 33-year-old husband with hereditary heart disease alive,” wrote one reader. “He loves to eat, I love to cook, but so many [low-salt] recipes are awful. Yours are awesome.”

– Neil Miller

