

Human Obstacle Course

In this cooperative activity, students will learn the importance of limiting the sodium they eat to help prevent several health problems.

MATERIALS:

1. Whiteboard or chart paper (optional)
2. [The Salty Six Infographic](#) (optional)
3. [Effects of Excess Sodium Infographic](#) (optional)



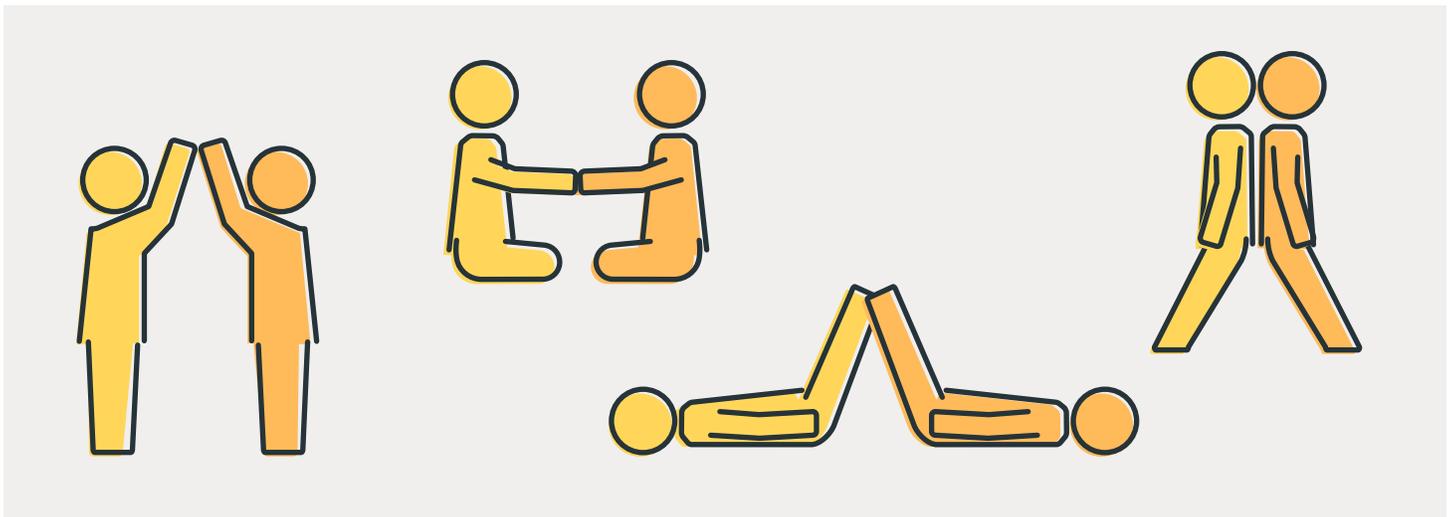
*I'd rather
have a healthy
heart than a
salty plate!*

PLAY:

1. Brainstorm a list of foods that are usually high in sodium (salt) such as soy sauce, salty snacks like potato chips and pretzels, and fast food. Then explain that many popular foods—such as breads and rolls, cold cuts (like lunch meat), pizza, soup, cheese, sandwiches, and poultry (e.g., turkey, chicken)—may also contribute a lot of sodium to their diets. Make sure students understand that table salt is sodium chloride and that many people use the terms sodium and salt interchangeably, even though they are not exactly the same thing.
2. Explain: “For some people, too much sodium in the diet can lead to serious health problems, such as high blood pressure, stroke, heart failure, and kidney disease. Ways to lower the sodium you eat include comparing food labels and choosing products with lower sodium; cutting back on packaged and restaurant foods; adding herbs, spices, citrus juices, or vinegars to food instead of salt; controlling portion sizes; and eating more fruits and vegetables both during meals and as snacks.”
3. Continue by explaining how sodium is linked to water retention in the body: “For some people, eating too much sodium can cause extra water to be pulled into your blood vessels, the tubes that carry blood through your body. Of course, our bodies need plenty of water to work right, but this extra water in our blood vessels makes our heart have to work harder.” Then explain what blood pressure is and link together the idea of excess sodium and high blood pressure: “Blood pressure is the force pushing outward on the walls of your blood vessels when your heart beats. High blood pressure can happen when extra water stays in the blood vessels, which tires the heart out by making it work harder to pump the extra fluid through the body. It’s like turning up the water supply to a garden hose—the pressure in the hose increases as more water is blasted through it. Over time, high blood pressure may damage your blood vessel walls and speed the build-up of gunky plaque that can block blood flow and eventually cause a heart attack.”

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- Next, introduce the game: "Now think of your circulatory system as an obstacle course for your blood to travel through. As we said, unneeded water in your system makes more work for your heart. This is like obstacles on an obstacle course that are harder to squeeze through or get over. Today, we're going to do a physical activity that will get our bodies moving for better heart, lung, and overall health. You will take turns to use your bodies to create obstacles and travel through our obstacle course. Listen carefully so we can safely have fun while becoming more physically fit."
- Divide students into pairs. Have half of the pairs scatter around the area. Direct these pairs to create obstacles with their bodies, such as by:
 - Sitting cross-legged, facing each other holding hands at shoulder level.
 - Standing facing each other and holding hands overhead.
 - Lying on their backs, with their feet sticking up and touching.
 - Standing back to back with their feet outward, balancing to create an inverted "V" with their legs.



- Direct the other half of the student pairs to hold hands, wrists, or shoulders or to link arms and travel through the obstacle course, moving over and under obstacle pairs. Caution all students to proceed slowly and carefully. As needed, redirect students to encourage safety.
- After everyone has had a turn, stop all students and have pairs reverse roles so travelers are obstacles and obstacles are travelers. Allow the new travelers time to navigate the obstacle course. Then stop play and gather students for a group discussion.
- Discuss which obstacles were easier to navigate (those with fewer obstructions, more space to crawl through, lower structures to go over, or not too many travelers trying to navigate the same obstacle at the same time). Then discuss which obstacles were more difficult to navigate.



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9. Remind students that too much sodium in their diets can make their blood pressure go up, which makes it harder for the heart to circulate the blood in the body. Tiring out the heart like that can increase the chance of other health problems. Limiting sodium in their diets from a young age promotes a healthy heart, healthy kidneys, and overall health. Reducing sodium in the diet doesn't have to mean reducing the flavor of food. Encourage students to ask their parents to flavor food with herbs, spices, vinegars, and citrus juice instead of salt. As we limit the amount of salt we eat, our preference for a salty taste starts to decrease. Plus we can enjoy the true, natural flavor of food!

FOR YOUNGER STUDENTS:

1. Start with smaller groups of travelers and obstacles.
2. Model how to navigate the obstacle course safely.
3. Have obstacles line up in a row rather than being scattered around the space.
4. Allow travelers to move as individuals rather than as pairs.

FOR OLDER STUDENTS:

1. Gradually increase the number of students working together to create each obstacle.
2. Likewise, increase the size of groups navigating the obstacle course connected to each other.
3. If students are playing safely, encourage travelers to increase the speed at which they are traveling through the obstacle course. Or direct travelers to vary the locomotor movements with which they are traveling between obstacles, such as by skipping, galloping, or hopping.
4. If students are playing safely, time groups of students to see how quickly they navigate the obstacle course.