The recent comprehensive review by Alderman\(^1\) of the current understanding about the relation of dietary sodium to health has prompted me to describe several episodes that suggest that low salt intake in older people can be hazardous, albeit short of stroke or heart attack. During the recent warm summer, I observed 4 apparently healthy people who had syncopal or near syncopal episodes. All were adhering to a low salt diet and were on antihypertensive medications. The observations were fortuitous and lack clinical detail, nonetheless, their presentations were characteristic of vascular syncope and are described here as anecdotal observations.

Observation 1: on a tennis court, a 70+ year old man was about to collapse and was taken to the side to sit down where he was given water and salt. He revived soon and was able to return to play. Observation 2: at a social gathering a 69-year-old woman seemed about to faint but responded to being placed in a prone position and given water and salt. Her pulse was weak and she lost awareness during the event. She had followed a strict low salt diet and had recently started a new blood pressure medication. The next day she was well; had increased her salt intake and stopped her blood pressure medication pending discussion with her doctor. Observation 3: a very fit long-distance bicycle rider collapsed while on a ride and was taken to an emergency room where he was given intravenous fluids and released. He was over 70, on blood pressure medicine, followed a low salt diet and had neglected to drink while on that bike ride. Observation 4: a man over 80 collapsed and was taken by ambulance to an emergency room where he was hydrated and released. He was on blood pressure medication, a low salt diet and admitted that he did not drink much water.

I believe that these 4 fortuitously observed episodes, despite the lack of definitive clinical information are, nonetheless, worthy of note. They are examples of compromised vascular integrity that can occur in older individuals.\(^2\) The low salt diets followed and the antihypertensive medications taken by each support the need for caution in the treatment of hypertension and the recommendation of salt restriction among elders.\(^1\)

REFERENCES