

EXTENSION UPDATE

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Limit Sodium Intake to Lower Blood Pressure

High blood pressure is becoming more common, but it isn't a good thing to have. Genetics, being overweight, smoking, and too much salt in the diet can be factors for high blood pressure.

Blood pressure is the measure of the force of blood pushing against blood vessel walls. The heart pumps blood into the blood vessels, which carry the blood throughout the body.

High blood pressure, also called hypertension, is dangerous because it makes the heart work harder to pump blood out to the body and contributes to hardening of the arteries, to stroke, kidney disease, and to heart failure.

The good news is research shows limiting sodium intake can lead to lowering blood pressure in some people.

Sodium is a mineral that the body needs in small amounts. The daily recommended amount of sodium is 2300 milligrams or 1 teaspoon of salt.

Sodium also is an electrolyte. Electrolytes work to balance fluid in the body and help the body absorb glucose. Too much sodium causes a shift in fluid balance, making the heart work harder, and increasing blood pressure.

Sodium can naturally be found in food, but processed foods usually contain even more sodium. Sometimes processed foods have the total daily recommended amount of sodium in one serving. The Food and Drug Administration is now leaning on the food industry to cut back on the amount of sodium added to processed and prepared foods.

One method to consume less sodium is to avoid processed and convenience foods. Read the food labels to know how much sodium is in the food. Be sure to also check the serving size. The amount of sodium will increase when consuming more than one serving.

Another method to eat less sodium is to try to cook and bake with less salt. Many times you can cut the salt in half in most recipes.

Use herbs or spices, such as basil, garlic powder, onion powder, curry, fresh chives, parsley, or cilantro to bring out flavors in food.

Whole spices and fresh herbs need to be cooked longer to bring out more flavor, so they should be added at the beginning of cooking.

Ground spices and dried herbs don't need to cook for long and can be added at the end of cooking. Start with small amounts because more herbs and spices can be added but never taken away.

Finally, always taste food before salting it. Try not to add salt at the table. Leaving your salt shaker in the kitchen cabinet is one way of putting a small barrier between salt and you.

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