SPICE UP YOUR LIFE WITHOUT SALT!

What is in salt that one is concerned about in reducing high blood pressure or hypertension?
- Salt and sodium are not the same thing. Table salt is sodium chloride: it is 40% sodium and 60% chloride.

- Some sodium is beneficial. Sodium is a mineral that occurs naturally in foods. It helps to maintain proper fluid balance—controlling the movement of fluids in and out of your cells, regulating blood pressure, transmitting nerve pulses, and helping muscles relax including the heart muscle. Need a minimum of 250 to 500 mg of sodium.

Your kidneys regulate the sodium level in your body. In healthy people, sodium levels do not get too concentrated—even when one consumes more than needed. Instead one’s body rids itself of the extra. Excess sodium passes out through the urine and to a much lesser extent through perspiration.

Is extra sodium always removed? No, when kidneys don’t work properly—perhaps due to kidney disease, extra sodium is not excreted making it harder for the heart to pump and increasing blood pressure.

Why is there so much attention to sodium: Up to 30% of the population is considered to have blood pressure that is “sodium sensitive”, but there is no way to figure out who these people are. Two possible factors are family history and aging.

Blood pressure:
Number on top is systolic pressure—peak pressure in arteries when your heart contracts.
Number on bottom is diastolic pressure lowest point of pressure when heart relaxes. Optimal is 120 /80 High is 140 /90

What is HBP? Higher than normal pressure on blood vessel walls. It occurs as blood gets pushed through arterioles (small blood vessels) that have become restricted and stiff. The passage of blood is narrowed. HBP causes the heart to work harder and over time may damage artery walls. Damage to blood vessels in the brain may cause a stroke.

Possible causes of high blood pressure:
Family history of high blood pressure—high blood pressure often runs in families. Overweight especially fat around the waist and midriff increases high blood pressure. Being overweight forces the heart to pump harder and increases the blood in circulation—both which contribute to high blood pressure.
Age: often goes up as people get older—men sooner than women
Inactive lifestyle: Physical activity alone won’t bring down HBP but being active does help with weight control.

Sodium sensitive: up to 30% of the American population is sodium sensitive-- a diet high in sodium may contribute to high blood pressure. Cutting back on sodium may help to reduce. There is no way to tell who is sodium sensitive. Stress may be a factor. Learn how to relieve stress.

Smoking: your chance of heart disease goes up. Too much drinking may increase risk for blood pressure. No more than one drink for women and two for men per day is recommended.

Diabetes-- blood pressure may go up if blood glucose is not managed well.

**Recommendation for sodium in diet:** 1500 mg/day if 51 years or older.

**Sodium in Food Choices.**
Salt brings out the food’s natural flavors. Was also used to preserve foods-- to inhibit the growth of bacteria, yeast, and molds. Sodium nitrate is used as preservation such as in ham and sausage and bacon. Preserve vegetables in brine such as in pickles.

Processed and restaurant foods deliver 77% of the sodium in the average American diet. 10 - 11% is added at the table, and the rest is added by cooks or occurs naturally in foods.

Processed foods such as cold cuts, hot dogs, canned soup, cheese, pizza, some cereals, salad dressings and condiments such as soy sauce, mustard and tartar sauce contain sodium. Check label for Na, salt, soda, or sodium.

Sodium occurs naturally in unprocessed foods, but the amounts are not high enough for concern.

**Sodium in Medications.** Some may contain sodium such as antacids and alkalizers, headache remedies, laxatives, sedatives and others.

If you are taking medication for HBP, eating less sodium can offer some benefits. Your medication may work more effectively, and you may even be able to reduce the dosage of medication needed to keep your blood pressure within healthy range.

**Taming your Taste Buds:**
Taste is how people chose one food over another, but you do not have to give up good taste. You can have plenty of flavor with less salt and sodium.

A preference for a strong salty taste is acquired-- probably started in childhood. It is the saltiness that people like which probably has more to do with the chloride in salt than the sodium. When people gradually cut back their sodium and learn
to go with less sodium in their food choices, the desire for salty tastes declines too. Over time, the less salt they consume, the less they want.

Moderate your sodium intake gradually if you are accustomed to salty tastes. Since a salty taste is learned, it takes time to unlearn it, and to appreciate new flavor combinations.

Follow the DASH diet (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) developed by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institutes which emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, fish, and low or non fat dairy products. This diet provides potassium, calcium, and magnesium that help maintain a healthy blood pressure.

So, eat plenty of fruits and vegetables that have very small amounts of sodium, and are wonderful sources of potassium.

Choose other foods within a food group that have less sodium such as fresh meats, poultry, fish, dry and fresh legumes, eggs, milk, and yogurt. Plain rice, pasta and oatmeal don’t have much sodium.

Season with herbs, spices, herbed vinegar, herb rubs and fruit juices. It is better to try herb spice blends as a flavorful alternative to salt ..........or lemon or lime juice. Check labels to be sure blends are salt or sodium free.

Learn to prepare food with less salt or high sodium ingredients. Don’t add salt to cooking water of pasta, rice, cereals and vegetables. Salt can toughen many vegetables especially beans as they are cooked.

If you rinse canned legumes and other vegetables in a strainer under cool running water, you can reduce sodium content by 40%.

Read Nutrition Facts information on label. Can look at % Daily Value though this value is based on 2400 mg per day. New recommendations of the US Dietary Guidelines are 1500 mg per day for people over 51. So this is 62.5% of the Daily Value on the label.

Compare sodium in one product with sodium in another such as pasta sauce. These products can vary a lot in sodium.

Cook at home more often -- from scratch -- to lower the sodium in your diet.

Check out restaurant websites and menu information for sodium content.

Reduce portion size to reduce sodium.
Cut back on condiments such as marinades, salad dressings, ketchup and soy sauce. Make your own salad dressing, or on a sandwich, use more lettuce and tomatoes for extra flavor.

A lot of people focus on reducing sodium in foods, but getting enough potassium is important too. Potassium, calcium and magnesium all help to lower blood pressure although this is not as widely known. The DASH diet provides plenty of these nutrients.

Magnesium sources: legumes, nuts, whole grains and green vegetables. Potassium sources: fruits and vegetables and beans. Dairy, fish, and nuts are also good sources. Milk and yogurt are good sources of calcium.

Some people do need to be cautious about the potassium in their diets such as those with impaired kidney function or when taking certain drugs. These people may need to limit potassium to prevent dangerous heart rhythm problems. This is especially true if you take hypertension medications that increase potassium retention such as ACE inhibitors and potassium sparing diuretics.

Using potassium chloride as a salt substitute is not recommended. Use only under medical supervision. Do not take potassium supplements unless under medical supervision.

What are your favorite ways to increase flavor without increasing salt?

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