

Too Much Salt - Is It Still A Concern?

With all of the attention these past few years on the fat in our diet, do you wonder if too much salt is still a concern?

What is the concern about too much salt?

Salt is the source of sodium in our diet. Too much sodium may lead to high blood pressure (also known as "hypertension"). If you have high blood pressure you have a greater chance of having a heart attack, a stroke or kidney failure.

Who should limit the amount of salt in their diet?

Not everyone who has too much salt in their diet develops high blood pressure. Family history plays a role. About 1 in 4 people are more likely to have high blood pressure because of too much salt in their diet. Can we easily identify the 1 in 4? No. For this reason most health experts encourage everyone to limit the daily amount of sodium to 2,400 milligrams (about 1 teaspoon of salt). Most of us get more than this recommended amount in our daily diet.

What is the best diet if you have high blood pressure?

- Reduce the amount of sodium in your diet by eating less processed foods such as fast foods, processed meat like ham, some cheeses, soup, etc. and choose foods naturally low in sodium such as fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, milk and fresh meat. Try not to add salt at the table.
- Maintain your ideal weight or lose weight if you need to.
- Be physically active.
- Lower the total fat in your diet since this is good for your heart and it can help you lose weight.
- Eat foods with potassium such as fruits and vegetables. Oranges, tomatoes and bananas are some examples.
- Limit how much alcohol you drink to no more than 1 - 2 drinks each day.

The bottom line...

Most of us eat too much salt. Our diet would be healthier if we eat less processed foods and choose more fresh fruits and vegetables. Calcium containing foods may help protect us from getting high blood pressure. Maintaining our ideal weight (or losing weight if we need to) can also help.

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- References:
1. "Heart Disease and Women: Preventing and Controlling High Blood Pressure," National Institutes of Health, 8/95
 2. "Putting the Lid on High Blood Pressure," P. Kendall, CO State Univ. Coop. Ext., 5/6/98

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