

Nutritional Therapy for High Blood Pressure

If you have high blood pressure, your doctor has probably recommended that you restrict the amount of salt in your diet. Since the diet most of us are used to is high in salt, making a change may seem difficult at first. But as you cut back on salt, you'll gradually find yourself learning to appreciate the flavor of unsalted food. Here are some tips for cutting back:



Try using herbs, spices and lemon juice as a flavor substitute for salt.

Remove Temptation

First, take that salt shaker off the table. You'll avoid the temptation to automatically salt your food before you even taste it. Next, cut back on salt added to food. Begin adding herbs, spices, lemon juice or other seasonings as you reduce salt. For flavorful alternatives to salt, invest in a good low-salt cookbook.

Skip the Processed Foods

Not only is home-cooked food tastier than processed food, but preparing your own foods has an added benefit when you want to reduce salt. Some examples of high-sodium foods you'll want to avoid are:

- pickles, olives and other foods processed in brine.
- processed lunch meats such as salami and bologna.
- chips, crackers and salted nuts.
- cheeses.
- soy sauce.
- smoked meats such as bacon and ham.
- bottled sauces and dressings.
- some soft drinks (check the label).
- most canned foods.
- packaged soups
- frozen prepared meals (TV dinners)

Read the Label

Of course, you can't avoid all prepared foods. When you do choose a canned or processed food, read the label. Salt may be listed as sodium or NaCl. The label may show the milligrams of sodium in a serving of the product. It may also show the percentage of your daily allowance of sodium that a serving contains.

The DASH Diet

The DASH diet—which stands for “Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension”—is becoming increasingly popular as a safe and easy way to combat hypertension. The principle behind the eating plan is that a combination of certain foods, which contain elevated amounts of particular nutrients, can effectively reduce high blood pressure. The plan stresses the consumption of fruits, vegetables, grains and low-fat dairy, and foods low in saturated fat, total fat and cholesterol. The emphasized foods are naturally high in magnesium, potassium, calcium, protein and fiber, and researchers believe that these nutrients are a key to lowering hypertension. To learn more about the DASH plan, talk with your healthcare provider, or a nutritionist or registered dietitian.

Quit Smoking

Many smokers can't taste the subtle flavors in foods. If you smoke and have high blood pressure, you have two reasons to quit. One is that smoking and high blood pressure give your heart a double whammy. The other is that when you quit, you'll no longer need to oversalt your food in order to taste it.

Know Your Limit

Find out from your doctor how much sodium you can safely consume. There are 2,000 milligrams of sodium in a teaspoon of salt. By limiting the salt you add in cooking, by avoiding prepared foods or choosing low-salt prepared foods and by learning to read labels, you can stay within your limit and give your heart the break it needs. And you will discover the added pleasure of foods whose natural flavors are no longer masked by the heavier taste of salt.