

salt intake causes high blood pressure (HBP).

In a press release, Prof. Fusgen stated that many otherwise healthy older people may be in danger simply because of the widespread belief that a low-salt diet is healthy.

Salt's best friend

I completely agree with Prof. Fusgen, but I'll take it even one step further. Not only does sodium intake NOT cause high blood pressure, in most cases it's not even a problem for people who already have HBP, provided they're getting enough of another nutrient.

According to the late Robert C. Atkins, M.D., the problem for those with HBP isn't sodium, it's a lack of balance between sodium and potassium levels. In fact, more than 25 separate studies show how increasing potassium intake (without decreasing the sodium) is an effective way to lower blood pressure. And one of those studies demonstrated that with just one daily serving of a potassium-rich food the risk of death by stroke may be cut by as much as HALF.

Fortunately, it's easy to increase the potassium in your diet. High potassium fruits include apricots, bananas, cantaloupe, honeydew melon and citrus fruits. Vegetables with good amounts of potassium are asparagus, potatoes, green beans, avocados, lima beans, winter squash, and cauliflower. Other foods high in potassium: grain products, red meat, poultry, seafood and dry beans, such as peas and lentils.

It would be difficult to get too much potassium from dietary sources alone. But if you're already getting plenty of potassium in your diet, a potassium supplement would be unnecessary for most people, and in some extreme cases could lead to kidney damage and other complications. Obviously, balance is called for. And – as always – talk to your doctor, dietician or health care practitioner before using potassium supplements to help manage high blood pressure.

Going Celtic

More than three years ago, in the e-Alert "Lower Your Blood Pressure Without Side Effects" (8/23/01), I told you about research indicating that severe sodium restriction, (much the same as Prof. Fusgen observed) actually increases the risk of premature death. On the other hand, a long-term overindulgence in salt is dangerous as well, putting stress on the kidneys, which remove excess salt from the blood.

So if you love your salt, you might try using sea salt. According to some physicians, moderate use of Celtic Sea Salt has been shown to have no negative effects on blood pressure and actually provides the body with a number of helpful minerals, including magnesium, which is essential for heart health.