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# Striking a Balance: Less Sodium (Salt), More Potassium

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In your battle against high blood pressure, sodium (salt) is your enemy.

Controlling that enemy is your primary weapon, but you also have an ally that many people don't know about: eating more potassium.

"More and more, we're realizing how important potassium plays a role in lowering blood pressure," said Rachel K. Johnson, Ph.D., M.P.H., R.D., an AHA spokeswoman, AHA Nutrition Committee Chair, and Bickford Professor of Nutrition at the University of Vermont.



### The Dangers of Sodium

Most Americans eat more than twice as much sodium than the American Heart Association recommends, consuming an average of more than 3,400 milligrams daily. That's why the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association is increasing awareness of sodium with the "Salty Six" – the top six sources of sodium in Americans' diets.

Yet, if we cut the average daily sodium intake by more than half — to less than 1,500 milligrams per day, as the American Heart Association recommends — high blood pressure would decrease nearly 26 percent and more than \$26 billion in healthcare costs would be saved over just a year. Another estimate projected that achieving this goal would reduce deaths from cardiovascular disease by 500,000 to nearly 1.2 million over the next 10 years.<sup>1</sup>

Some foods naturally contain some sodium. But more than 75 percent of sodium that Americans consume comes from processed foods, Johnson said. The sodium content of packaged and prepared foods can vary widely. Be sure to read Nutrition Facts labels on food items and compare the sodium content of similar products, and choose the one with the lowest amount of sodium you can find in your store.

### The Power of Potassium

On the other hand, potassium is a potent weapon because:

- The more potassium we consume, the more sodium is excreted through urine and out of the body.
- Potassium helps relax blood vessel walls, which helps lower blood pressure.

"Consuming more potassium is not an excuse to not be concerned about the amount of salt in your diet, but it can definitely help blunt the blood pressure-raising effects of sodium," said Johnson.

### Potassium-rich foods include:

- Sweet potatoes
- Potatoes
- Greens
- Spinach
- Mushrooms
- Lima beans
- Peas
- Bananas
- Tomatoes, tomato juice and tomato sauce (look for low-sodium versions)
- Oranges and orange juice
- Cantaloupe and honeydew melons
- Grapefruit and grapefruit juice (talk to your healthcare provider if you're taking a cholesterol-lowering drug)
- Prunes and prune juice
- Apricots and apricot juice
- Raisins and dates
- Fat-free or low-fat (1 percent) milk
- Fat-free yogurt
- Halibut
- Tuna
- Molasses

In fact, many of the natural sources of potassium — fruits, fat-free or low-fat dairy foods and fish — are part of the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (D.A.S.H.) eating plan.

The recommended daily intake of potassium for an average adult is about 4,700 milligrams. But it's only part of your total diet. Other dietary factors that may affect blood pressure include amount and type of dietary fat; cholesterol; protein and fiber; and calcium and magnesium.

Potassium also affects the balance of fluids in your body. So talk to your healthcare provider before taking over-

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## Sodium & High Blood Pressure



## Sodium Infographics

the-counter potassium supplements (as we get older, our kidneys become less able to remove potassium from our blood). You should also consult with your doctor before trying salt substitutes, which contain potassium chloride that is harmful if you have certain medical conditions or take certain medications.

Learn more:

- [Potassium and High Blood Pressure](#)
- [Recipes with Less Sodium](#)
- [The Scoop on Sodium Quiz](#)
- [Processed Foods: here is all that salt coming from?](#)
- [The Salty Six: Are the Foods You Eat Most Often High in Sodium?](#)
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<sup>1</sup>Coxson PG, Cook NR, Joffres M, Hong Y, Orenstein D, Schmidt SM, Bibbins-Domingo K. Mortality benefits from US population-wide reduction in sodium consumption: Projections from 3 modeling approaches. *Hypertension*. 2013;61:564-570.

Last reviewed on 04/29/14



What can too much sodium do to you? Check out our sodium infographics to find out!

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