

[IMAGE]

DASH Toward Better Health

High blood pressure (hypertension) is dangerous because it causes the heart to work harder. When the heart works too hard, the strain can contribute to life-threatening conditions such as a heart attack or stroke. High blood pressure also damages arteries, leading to arterial disease.

It's well-established that sodium reduction is useful for people with hypertension, and for those trying to avoid it. But how much of a reduction is enough? A recent study published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* reports that salt reduction might have a greater effect on your blood pressure than you might think. In the study, 412 subjects were randomly assigned to consume a diet typical of the normal American diet, or the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet.

The DASH diet is rich in fruits, vegetables and low-fat dairy. Within each group, subjects ate foods with high, intermediate and low levels of salt for 30 days. The researchers discovered that reducing sodium intake from the highest to the intermediate level reduced average systolic blood pressure in the control group and the DASH group. The greatest reduction occurred in subjects who consumed the low-salt DASH diet.

Do you have too much salt in your diet? Chances are, the answer is yes. Talk to your doctor about the fundamentals of a low-sodium, low-fat diet rich in vitamins and minerals. Information on high blood pressure can also be found on the American Heart Association's website: <http://www.americanheart.org>.

Reference:

Sacks F, Svetkey L, Vollmer W, et al. Effects on blood pressure of reduced dietary sodium and the dietary approaches to stop hypertension (DASH) diet. *The New England Journal of Medicine* January 2001:344, pp3-9.

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