Salt, Hypertension, and You

What is hypertension?

Hypertension is a term used to describe high blood pressure. When measuring blood pressure it is expressed within a fraction; systolic blood pressure over the diastolic blood pressure. These readings are measuring the amount of pressure exerted against the arterial walls during the contraction and relaxation phase of a heart beat. To learn more about blood pressure watch this quick educational clip about the Blood Pressure Basics. (NIH, 2012.)

*It is important to note that there are NO signs or symptoms of high blood pressure.*

*Make sure to get tested when you go in for your regular check up.*

What is salt?

There are many different kinds of salt, but the main component is sodium (Na), which is an essential nutrient for many basic functions within the body. Deficiency conditions are likely to develop if the amounts of sodium are too low, but on-the-other-hand, if sodium amounts exceed the physiological range for long periods of time, it can have a negative effect on the body. (Karppanen & Mervaala, 2006)

How much salt does the average American eat?

The average intake of salt in the United States is approximately 5- to 6-fold compared to a natural diet or a similar diet without the salt added.(Karppanen & Mervaala, 2006)

It is estimated that about 9 grams of Sodium Chloride (Table Salt) is consumed daily in an average American diet of 2,400 calories. The high sources of salt are coming from the increased amounts of processed foods being eaten. In fact, the volume of salt consumed has increased about 55% just from the 1980’s to the 1990’s! Since the 1990’s, many more processed products have been put on the shelves with longer shelf lives!
These types of high-salt content foods are helping to create hypertension within America. (Karppanen & Mervaala, 2006)

**Prolonged Excess Salt Intake:**

*Increases the Requirement of Water:* With excess sodium levels within the body, physiologically the mind tells the body to drink more water to balance out the high amount of salt. If drinking 8 cups of water a day is hard, think about how much the body needs if it is taking in 9 grams of salt per day.

*Puts your Kidneys to Work:* The kidneys are the sodium-and-water balancing organs within the body. Although the functioning rate of the kidney depends on genetics, excess salt intake can overload the kidneys and could lead to an increase of salt within the blood.

*Can Cause High Blood Pressure:* Where there is salt, water follows. When there is an excess amount of salt within the blood, this means that there will be an excess amount of water to balance out the viscosity or thickness of the fluid. The more volume that is contained within your blood vessel walls, the more pressure against the arterial walls; thus causing high blood pressure, or hypertension.

**Decreasing the Amount of Salt in your Daily Diet:**

A study done in Finland showed that a significant decrease in salt intake can decrease the risk of stroke and coronary heart disease mortality up to 75 -80%. (Karppanen & Mervaala, 2006) If Finland had such amazing results, we should keep the healthy tradition going in ‘da UP eh?’

Studies have proven that a reduction in salt can lower blood pressure. It is strongly recommended to reduce the amount of salt intake in one’s diet to prevent and treat hypertension. (Karppanen & Mervaala, 2006)

**Are there healthy options for salt?**

Here is a website that lays out all of the information about many varieties of sea salt available to buy. Judge for yourself!  [Sea Salt Information](#).

There are many different kinds of salt. Click the link to watch a quick clip regarding a variety of common cooking salts. [Salt –Different Kinds of Salt](#).

*It is important to talk to your primary health physician or family care doctor to see if you should be decreasing your daily salt intake.*
References:

