



# Nutrition & Health

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## The “Silent Killer” – High Blood Pressure

High blood pressure affects about one of every four American adults. Unfortunately it produces no symptoms. About one out of every three people with high blood pressure does not know they have it. This is why it is often labeled the “silent killer.”

With current lifestyle behaviors, most people in the United States will develop high blood pressure in their lifetime. In fact, the current prediction is that even if you have normal blood pressure at age 55, you will have a 90% risk of developing high blood pressure in your lifetime. More than half of all Americans have developed high blood pressure before they qualify for Medicare.

So what can you do? Keep an eye on your blood pressure – have it checked regularly. Your pressure is given in two numbers which are systolic pressure, as the heart beats, over the diastolic pressure, as the heart relaxes between beats. Any pressure reading with a systolic number between 120 and 139 and a diastolic pressure between 81 and 80 is considered pre-hypertension, a warning to begin some behaviors which can improve blood pressure. Pressures above the numbers for pre-hypertension are officially diagnosed as hypertension or high blood pressure.

The Dietary Guidelines (DG’s) for Americans released in January of 2005 indicate that diets high in sodium/salt can increase our risk for developing high blood pressure. But, the nutrient potassium counteracts the effect of sodium/salt on blood pressure. So the guidelines advise us to reduce the amount of sodium we eat and increase the amount of potassium we eat.

The DG’s recommend we consume less than 2,300 milligrams of sodium per day (approximately 1 tea-

spoon of salt). If we already have hypertension, are black, middle-aged or older, the DG’s recommend consuming no more than 1,500 milligrams of sodium per day and meeting the potassium recommendation of 4,700 milligrams per day with food.

Sometimes potassium information is given on food labels but it is not required information so it is good to know what foods are good sources of potassium. Good potassium sources are: 1. leafy green vegetables (beet greens and spinach), 2. fruits such as tomatoes, prunes, bananas, peaches, apricots, cantaloupe and honeydew, 3. root vegetables like sweet potatoes and carrots, 4. fish like clams, Halibut, Yellowfin Tuna, Pacific Rockfish, Pacific Cod and Rainbow Trout.

Tips for reducing sodium:

- Always check the nutrition facts label on foods. If you are trying to stay at 1,500 milligrams or below, you may want to watch the milligrams of sodium. If you are working at staying under 2,300 milligrams of sodium, watch the % Daily Value. Items at five percent or less are low in sodium.
- Limit your intake of canned vegetables – focus on fresh and frozen. Always rinse canned vegetables if you do use them.
- Use oil instead of butter or margarine for cooking and baking.
- Select low-sodium soups – regular soups are very high in sodium content.
- Limit salty snacks like chips, pretzels and nuts.
- Don’t add salt when cooking foods and always taste at the table before adding salt.
- Use seasonings and spices instead of salt, butter and margarine to flavor foods. Consider salt-free combination blends.