

Watch Both Minerals

Sodium has been part of the health concerns for many years. With thousands of us living with high blood pressure, most people make at least a little effort to limit their salt intake. But now the 2005 Dietary Guidelines emphasize two minerals, sodium *and* potassium. As before, we are still encouraged to limit how much salt we use. But now we are also encouraged to increase the amount of potassium we eat. Many people are asking: Why?

Potassium has several important jobs in our bodies. One job is to limit the effects of salt on blood pressure. If our potassium intake is high, sodium does not raise our blood pressure as much. Diets high in potassium help protect us from kidney stones. And people with diets higher in potassium usually suffer less bone loss as they age. Osteoporosis is becoming a more widespread problem, in men as well as women, as more of us live to older ages. So keeping those bones strong and solid is important.

The recommendation is that adults get at least 4,700 mg of potassium a day, mainly from food sources. Some people are very sensitive to the taste of potassium and find it extremely bitter. Even salt substitutes made from potassium taste awful to these people. But a baked sweet potato will put almost 700 mg of potassium into your diet, and tastes much, much better.

Other good sources of potassium include tomato products, such as paste, sauce and juice; dark green leafy vegetables, such as beet greens and spinach; dairy products, especially yogurt; beans and peas; carrots, bananas, winter squash, peaches, prunes and melons; and many seafood products. Including several of these in your daily menu won't be too hard, and could be very beneficial to your heart, your bones and your kidneys. Eat for your health!