

**PENNY SAVER NEWS**

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Holiday season or not, most of us are feeling more pressure these days. There's no need to list all the reasons, economic, social and in our families. Some things we can do something about, some things we can manage better, some we can't affect at all. While a bubble bath or walk in the park could help us handle the stress, those are often not enough to keep our blood pressure from going up. A better diet could help!

Unfortunately for many of us, our diets only make matters worse when it comes to blood pressure. National statistics say that our salt intake has been rising steadily, along with our blood pressures, over the last 30 years. Most of us have surely heard the recommendations, maybe even from our doctors, to eat less salt. But we don't.

Why not? Probably because we're so used to the taste of very salty foods that anything less tastes bland and flat. Most of the salt in our diets comes from processed foods, including restaurant and fast food items. So if we try to make it at home without salt, our tongues rebel! "Ugh!" they scream, "Give me my salt!" So we do, and a lot of blood pressures rise. And just cooking without salt, without changing what we buy and what we order when we eat out isn't enough to make a big difference.

But the good news is that the original DASH diets, the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension, were not low salt diets! These first diets tested by the National Institutes of Medicine had double the amount of sodium recommended today. But they still had a good effect. Instead of taking away salt, the diet was designed to increase 3

minerals that counter-balance the bad effects of sodium. These minerals are calcium, potassium and magnesium.

We can absorb more calcium from dairy products than from vegetables. That might be why certain groups who don't drink a lot of milk tend to have higher blood pressures - they're not getting as much calcium. Increasing the amount of low-fat or fat-free dairy products in your diet can be a great first step to lowering your blood pressure. The recommended amounts are 2 to 3 cups or servings a day of dairy products, or at least 1200 mg of calcium from foods and supplements.

Potassium and magnesium are best eaten in fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Root vegetables and fruits like melons that grow on vines are the best sources of potassium. The recommended amount of potassium for all of us is 4700 mg a day. Don't take potassium supplement pills unless your doctor prescribes them. Too much can be dangerous! Instead, aim for 4 to 5 servings each of fruits and vegetables daily.

Nuts, beans and green leafy veggies like spinach are the best sources of magnesium. Fortified cereals can also be good sources of this important mineral. Adults over age 50 need a little more than younger adults. Men over 50 should get 420 mg a day, women need 320 mg. There's no evidence magnesium from pills will help, but 4-5 veggies a day and beans 3 times a week will.

As for the sodium or salt we hear so much about, yes, eating less is definitely good. Most average American diets have double or triple the amount we really need. So reading package labels to select the lower sodium products is a very smart move. Choosing less salty foods little by little, making the change gradually, will allow your taste buds to adjust.

But as you work on that, start increasing the amount of fruits and vegetables you put on your plate. Switch a couple more grain products to whole grains instead of white. If you're careful you could start seeing the blood pressure drop in as little as 2 weeks. To get the full recommendations for the DASH diet you can start at [www.dashdiet.org](http://www.dashdiet.org), or call me and I'll send you some materials.

Here's a super-healthy dessert alternative to sweet potato pie for the holidays, or any day! For Christmas use dried cranberries instead of raisins, and arrange them in the shape of a tree or wreath. Enjoy!

#### Sweet Potato Custard

1 cup cooked, mashed sweet potato	1 cup mashed banana (2 small)
1 cup evaporated skim milk	2 Tbsp packed brown sugar
1/3 cup egg substitute	1/2 tsp salt
1/4 cup raisins	1 Tbsp sugar
1 tsp ground cinnamon	Nonstick pan spray

Preheat oven to 300° F. Spray 1 quart casserole dish with cooking spray. Mix sweet potato, banana, milk, brown sugar, egg and salt until smooth. Pour into casserole. Combine sugar, raisins and cinnamon and sprinkle over mixture. Bake 45 to 50 minutes until a knife inserted into center comes out clean. Serves 6.

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