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Vegetables Help Lower Blood Pressure

The DASH diet was developed to help people lower their blood pressure. The first version wasn't even low in salt, but it worked. Reducing sodium made it even more effective. It was designed to give us more calcium, potassium, magnesium and fiber. The DASH diet recommends 2 to 2 1/2 cups of fruits and the same of vegetables every day, along with beans and nuts for part of our protein, whole grains and low fat dairy products. The current version also recommends less salt and saturated fat than the usual American diet.

It doesn't matter how you eat your veggies - cooked, canned, raw, frozen, fresh are all good. How much salt you add and what kind of sauces you use do make a difference. Choose the canned versions with 'No Salt Added', and frozen ones without added sauces. Most of the year, with most veggies, you'll be getting about the same nutrition whichever form you choose. Just eat more of them!

One recent study found that of people who exercised more, stopped smoking and ate a DASH diet, over one third of them, 35%, were able to bring their blood pressure into the normal range without medications! It works, but taking supplements of those individual minerals doesn't do a thing for blood pressure. Which leads a lot of doctors to suspect that there's more in those fruits and vegetables than we know about.

Two of the compounds that might be responsible actually have a bad name in many health circles. Nitrites and nitrates are better known from bacon and ham, and blamed for causing cancers when they combine with proteins. But almost 80% of the nitrates in our diets come from vegetables, which have much less protein than meats.

And nitric oxide is known to help relax blood vessels. That's why nitroglycerin relieves chest pain. Diets high in vegetables also show completely no connection to certain cancers previously associated with nitrogen compounds.

So, maybe one of the reasons all those vegetables help bring your blood pressure down is the nitrogen compounds they contain. Fill half your plate with veggies every time you eat, use them for snacks, put them in soup, add them to your sandwich. The more colors you get over the week, the better off you'll be. But no, you still can not count bacon as a vegetable, or a health food, no matter how much nitrite it contains!

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