High Blood Pressure and Salt Restriction is the Wrong Method

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If you're at risk of heart attack or stroke, or if you have high blood pressure, your doctor may have started a conversation about salt intake and probably recommended that you cut back on your sodium.  

(Newswire.net -- October 24, 2013) -- That is the official government mantra going way back. That should already be a warning signal!

The current national dietary guidelines call suggests that people at risk of cardiovascular disease should limit sodium intake to 1500 milligrams or less a day. That's a little over half a teaspoon.

Currently nearly half of the U.S. population falls into this definition of the "restricted sodium intake" community.

Surprisingly the American Heart Association even recommends a sodium-restricted diet for everyone. All in the name of prevention. It should now come as a surprise that the recommendations they've been making for years are actually shortening life spans.

That's right. Extensive studies have revealed that extremely low-sodium diets may be shortening the lives they were intended to protect.

A study commissioned by the CDC and just recently released to the public shows that a more sensible (and easily achieved) sodium intake of 2300 mg or more is actually better for overall health... even in so-called at-risk groups. Any lower than that and you may be increasing your risk of an early death.

Blood pressure does drop when you eat less salt. That's a proven fact, and it's the reason that doctors everywhere push their patients to consume less salt. Only recently have researchers begun looking at outcomes of various sodium intakes on things like heart attack, stroke, and early death.

The first study was troubling. Two groups of patients with congestive heart failure were instructed to eat equal diets. Only one difference. Once group was allowed 2760 mg of sodium a day and the other was allowed only 1840 mg of sodium a day.

Those in the low-sodium group were admitted to the hospital at three times the rate of those in the higher group. And twice as many patients in the low-sodium group died during the course of the study.

A follow up study of a much larger group confirmed that eating too little sodium presents similar risks to eating too much. Most people had the best health — lowest incidence of heart attack, stroke, and other cardiovascular incidents — if they consumed between 3000 and 7000 mg of sodium per day.

This flies in the face of conventional wisdom. But according to doctors, there are good reasons why this might be happening. Low sodium levels in the body are associated with higher triglyceride levels and higher insulin resistance, both associated with heart disease risk.
In spite of all this new evidence, the FDA is currently considering revising recommended daily allowances of salt down into the unhealthy range!

If you're at higher risk of heart disease because you have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or high blood sugar, your doctor may have recommended a low-sodium diet. In light of these studies, you may want to talk to your doctor and see if her recommendations need updating.

You may also ask that she refer you to a nutritionist, someone who can help you design a sensible overall diet to support your health needs.

Either way, don't take these studies as permission to ignore your salt intake. Remember, too much salt is just as bad, or worse, than too little. Either extreme can affect your heart health.

The best way to control your salt intake and keep it in the ideal range is to cut out as many processed foods as possible. Most processed foods are ridiculously high in sodium. If you eat lean meats, fresh vegetables, whole grains, and meals you prepare and season yourself, you'll not only put your salt intake where it ought to be, you'll also improve your overall nutrition... which means better health, too.