

Healthy Eating Advice – Raised Blood Pressure

If you have been diagnosed with high blood pressure (hypertension) there are several measures you can take, such as taking regular (moderate) exercise, eating less salt, eating more fruit and vegetables, not drinking too much alcohol and maintaining your weight within the recommended range. These measures will help to reduce your blood pressure and for some individuals may be all that is required, however for others, some form of medication may also be prescribed.

As some people are sensitive to salt levels in their diet it is important to ensure that you control your intake of salt. Adults should eat no more than 6 grams of salt a day (about a teaspoonful) however this does not simply refer to the amount of salt added to food either during cooking or at the table. Most of the salt in our diet is “hidden” salt, contained in many processed, convenience and take-away foods.

Some foods will always be high in salt and so should only be eaten in small quantities; these include bacon, cheese, gravy granules, stock cubes, soy sauce, pickles and smoked products. However, in some common foods the level of salt varies widely between brands so it is important to check the labels. Some products to check are ready meals, soups, pasta sauces, pizza and crisps.

To check whether a food is high in salt you must find the quantity per 100grams.

A food is considered to be high in salt if the quantity per 100 grams is more than 1.5 grams (or it may be shown as 0.6 grams of sodium).

A low salt product contains less than 0.3 grams (or 0.1 grams of sodium).

You can reduce the amount of salt you eat by:-

1. Comparing salt levels in products such as bread, breakfast cereals and pasta sauces.
2. Choose reduced or no-added-salt products if possible.
3. Reduce the amount of soy sauce, pickles, mayonnaise and mustard that you use.
4. Cut down on the amount of smoked foods that you eat.
5. Do not automatically add salt to foods during preparation or at the table.
6. Flavour foods with herbs, spices and marinades rather salt when cooking.
7. Make your own stock or gravy.

It is important to remember that:-

A high-salt food will not necessarily taste salty.

Sea-salt is no more healthy than ordinary table salt.

The amount of alcohol you drink can also affect your blood pressure. You should not exceed recommended alcohol consumption levels of 3-4 units per day for men (up to a maximum of 21 a week) and 2-3 units per day for women (to a maximum of 14 a week). It is also advisable to have at least 1 or 2 alcohol-free days each week.

One unit of alcohol equates to:-

half a pint (300ml) of normal strength beer, lager or cider,
a measure of spirits (25ml),

a small glass of wine (100ml).