

February 17, 2002

Too much on salt

How much salt should humans consume? Salt and hypertension are particularly related to blacks. These people went from a Paleolithic society to a markedly advanced civilization in less than 300 years with their same metabolic machinery that had a meager need for salt. Therefore, the incidence of hypertension is 2 1/2 times higher in African Americans than in Caucasian Americans.

Further increasing the problem was the selection of folks who were genuinely able to hold on to the most salt. The degree of hypertension is related to the darkness of skin color.

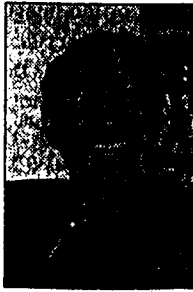
With African Americans, there is more salt-sensitivity, which is a result of those individuals who could not withstand the crossing of the Atlantic in the slave ships because their kidneys were not conditioned for salt conservation and these people did not survive. The ones who did survive procreated offspring that were also salt-sensitive. Therefore, it is much easier to reduce the blood pressure of an African American with salt restriction and/or diuretic (a pill that causes outpouring of fluid and salt) than a Caucasian

American.

Decreasing salt intake is good for all of us. Certainly, no table salt should be used, no addition of salt to food when cooking is a must, and the avoidance of processed food that has added salt is imperative. Many processed foods are not labeled with their salt content. Fresh meat is low in salt. All uncooked pastas, rice, olive oil, unsalted nuts, fruit juices, tea, coffee, and alcoholic drinks are low in salt. In contrast, foods that have high salt include prepared meat products (bacon, sausage, ham, canned foods, smoked fish), instant noodles and soup, yeast extract, soy sauce and snacks that are obviously placed in front of us to enhance thirst, such as salted peanuts, pretzels, potato chips, etc. Also, just one hamburger with french fries generally contains 5 grams of salt!

Hypertension is a major cause of heart attack, stroke, aortic dissection, aortic aneurysm, and accelerated atherosclerosis. The reduction of salt to less than 2 grams a day would result in the prevention of hypertension in the majority of humans and many of the problems that lead to a premature death. It is said that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure; so reduction of an ounce of salt is worth an additional three decades of better life.

Next week we'll discuss the 40/30/30 diet program that will enable us to be healthy and happy and thin for many years to come.



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BLOCK**

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