
CENTRAL PA HEALTH CARE QUALITY UNIT NEWSLETTER FOR HEALTHY OUTCOMES

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Shaking the Salt Habit

From Health A to Z

Please pass (on) the salt. It's not just good advice for people with high blood pressure. If you're sensitive to salt and have normal blood pressure, it can still be hard on your heart. Salt sensitivity is a measure of how blood pressure responds to salt. About one in four Americans with normal blood pressure is sensitive to salt. More than half (58 percent) with hypertension are salt-sensitive.

You are more likely to be salt-sensitive if you:

- Are older
- Are African American
- Have a family member with high blood pressure or salt sensitivity



One consequence of salt sensitivity is high blood pressure. This increases your risk of developing heart disease, the number one killer of men and women in the United States. Sensitivity to salt can also increase your risk of developing kidney problems and enlargement of the left ventricle, your heart's main pumping chamber.

Reducing the sodium in your diet can significantly reduce your blood pressure, even if you do not have hypertension. The average American consumes about 3,300 mg of sodium per day. That's one quarter more than the 2,400 mg recommended by the National Heart Lung and Blood Institute's High Blood Pressure Education Program and twice as much as the 1,500-mg limit in the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet.

Sodium used as a preservative, curing agent or flavoring in processed foods is the biggest source of sodium in the American diet. One third of the sodium in your diet is naturally present in foods and another -third comes from table salt.

Measuring your sodium intake can be hard, especially when you eat prepared foods or eat in restaurants. Here are some tips to de-salt your diet:

- **Read food labels** carefully to help you choose foods that are low in sodium. Almost all packaged foods contain sodium, but there are low-, reduced-sodium and no-salt-added versions. What is the difference in these terms?
- **Sodium free** is less than 5 mg per serving.
- **Very low sodium** is 35 mg or less.
- **Low sodium** is 140 mg or less.
- **Reduced sodium** means a 25 percent reduction in the usual level of sodium.
- **Buy fresh food.** Fresh vegetables, poultry, fish and lean meat are better alternatives than canned or processed foods. You can try rinsing canned foods, such as tuna, to remove some sodium.
- **Avoid foods that are high in sodium.** Canned and dried foods and processed luncheon meats and cheeses are some common high-sodium foods. Bacon, sausage, corned beef, hot dogs and pizza are also high in sodium. So are condiments such as ketchup, mustard and soy sauce. Instead, try eating more fruits, vegetables, grains and low-fat dairy foods.
- **Put away the saltshaker.** Use herbs, spices and other salt-free seasonings when you cook. Cook rice, pasta and hot cereals without salt.
- **Keep a sodium diary** to help you decide which foods to decrease or eliminate. You may be surprised at how much sodium you consume each day.

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Cataracts

From Walgreens.com

Cataracts are a common age-related vision problem. About 20.5 million Americans age 40 and older have cataracts, and the older a person gets the greater the risk for developing cataracts. Women are more likely to develop cataracts than men, and African Americans and Hispanic Americans are at particularly high risk.

In addition to age, other factors may increase the risk of cataract development. These include:

- Diabetes
- Smoking
- Over-exposure to sunlight

Symptoms

During the early stages, cataracts may have little effect on vision. Symptoms vary due to the location of the cataract in the eye. Depending on the type and extent of the cataract, patients may experience the following symptoms:

- Cloudy vision
- Double or blurry vision
- Glare and sensitivity to bright lights
- Colors appear faded
- Difficulty reading due to reduced black-white contrast



Treatment

Cataracts never go away on their own, but some stop progressing after a certain point. But if cataracts continue to grow and progress, they can cause blindness if left untreated. Fortunately, cataracts can nearly always be successfully removed with surgery. Millions of cataract surgeries are performed each year in the United States, and there is a very low risk for complications. However, before opting for surgery, patients need to consider on an individual basis how severely a cataract interferes with their quality of life. Cataract surgery is rarely an emergency, so patients have time to consult with their doctors and carefully consider the risks and benefits of surgery.

The prevalence of cataracts increases dramatically with age. It typically occurs in the following way:

The lens is an elliptical structure that sits behind the pupil and is normally transparent. The function of the lens is to focus light rays into images on the retina (the light-sensitive tissue at the back of the eye). In young people, the lens is elastic and changes shape easily, allowing the eyes to focus clearly on both near and distant objects. As people reach their mid-40s, biochemical changes occur in the proteins within the lens, causing them to harden and lose elasticity. This causes a number of vision problems. For example, loss of elasticity causes *presbyopia*, or far-sightedness, requiring reading glasses in almost everyone as they age.

In some people, the proteins in the lens, notably those called alpha crystallins, may also clump together, forming cloudy (*opaque*) areas called cataracts. They usually develop slowly over several years and are related to aging. In some cases, depending on the cause of the cataracts, loss of vision progresses rapidly.

Depending on how dense they are and where they are located, cataracts can block the passage of light through the lens and interfere with the formation of images on the retina, causing vision to become cloudy.

Prognosis

Some cataracts stop progressing after a certain point. Cataracts are never reversible, however, even after eliminating factors (such as drugs or illnesses), which might have promoted their development. If extensive and progressive cataracts are left untreated they can cause blindness. In fact, cataracts are the leading cause of blindness among adults age 55 and older. About 20.5 million Americans have at least one cataract. By 2020, that number is expected to jump to 30.1 million.



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Vitamin D Deficiency

From Web MD

If you shun the sun, suffer from milk allergies, or adhere to a strict vegetarian diet, you may be at risk for vitamin D deficiency. Known as the sunshine vitamin, vitamin D is produced by the body in response to sunlight. It is also occurs naturally in a few foods -- including fish, fish liver oils, and egg yolks -- and in fortified dairy and grain products. Vitamin D is essential for strong bones because it helps the body use calcium from the diet. Traditionally, vitamin D deficiency has been associated with rickets, a disease in which the bone tissue doesn't properly mineralize, leading to soft bones and skeletal deformities. But increasingly, research is revealing the importance of vitamin D in protecting against a host of health problems.

Symptoms and Health Risks of Vitamin D Deficiency

Symptoms of bone pain and muscle weakness can mean you have a vitamin D deficiency. However, for many people, the symptoms are subtle. Yet even without symptoms, too little vitamin D can pose health risks. Low blood levels of the vitamin have been associated with the following:

- Increased risk of death from cardiovascular disease
- Cognitive impairment in older adults
- Severe asthma in children
- Cancer



Research suggests that vitamin D could play a role in the prevention and treatment of a number of different conditions, including type1 and type 2 diabetes, hypertension, glucose intolerance, and multiple sclerosis.

Causes of Vitamin D Deficiency

Vitamin D deficiency can occur for a number of reasons:

- *You don't consume the recommended levels of the vitamin over time.** This is likely if you follow a strict vegetarian diet, because most of the natural sources are animal-based, including fish and fish oils, egg yolks, cheese, and beef liver.
- *Your exposure to sunlight is limited.** Because the body makes vitamin D when your skin is exposed to sunlight, you may be at risk of deficiency if you are homebound, live in northern latitudes, wear long robes or head coverings for religious reasons, or have an occupation that prevents sun exposure.
- *You have dark skin.** The pigment melanin reduces the skin's ability to make vitamin D in response to sunlight exposure. Some studies show that older adults with darker skin are at high risk of vitamin D deficiency.
- *Your kidneys cannot convert vitamin D to its active form.** As people age their kidneys are less able to convert vitamin D to its active form, thus increasing their risk of vitamin D deficiency.
- *Your digestive tract cannot adequately absorb vitamin D.** Certain medical problems, including Crohn's disease, cystic fibrosis, and celiac disease, can affect your intestine's ability to absorb vitamin D from the food you eat.
- *You are obese.** Vitamin D is extracted from the blood by fat cells, altering its release into the circulation. People with a body mass index of 30 or greater often have low blood levels of vitamin D.

Tests for Vitamin D Deficiency

The most accurate way to measure how much vitamin D is in your body is the 25-hydroxy vitamin D test. In the kidney, 25-hydroxy vitamin D changes into an active form of the vitamin. The active form of the vitamin can be measured through the blood. The active form of vitamin D helps control calcium and phosphate levels in the body. The normal range is 30.0 to 74.0 nanograms per milliliter (ng/mL). A lower level indicates vitamin D deficiency, which you should discuss with your doctor.

Treatment for Vitamin D Deficiency

Treatment for vitamin D deficiency involves getting more vitamin D -- through diet, supplements, and/or through spending more time in the sun. Although there is no consensus on vitamin D levels required for optimal health -- and it likely differs depending on age and health conditions -- a concentration of less than 20 nanograms per milliliter is generally considered inadequate, requiring treatment.

If you don't spend much time in the sun or always are careful to cover your skin (sunscreen inhibits vitamin D production), you should speak to your doctor about taking a vitamin D supplement, particularly if you have risk factors for vitamin D deficiency.

The information offered in this newsletter is to increase your awareness of health related conditions and situations and not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice. If you believe you or someone you support has a condition, please seek the advice of a physician.

Healthy Holiday Food and Diet Tips

From: Kathleen M. Zelman, MPH, RD, LD, Web MD

As much as we look forward to holiday parties and dinners, many of us fear enjoying it too much – and packing on the pounds. Indeed, the average American consumes approximately 4,500 calories and 229 grams fat from eating a traditional Thanksgiving dinner. And that doesn't include breakfast, lunch, or late-night snacking on leftovers.

Studies show that the average American gains 1 to 2 pounds during the holiday season. And, those extra pounds tend to become permanent baggage. Year after year, those pounds can add up, and contribute to overweight or obesity later in life.

Although we may not all gain weight over the holidays, there is no question we tend to eat and drink more -- and exercise less. With the hustle and bustle of holiday shopping, parties and festive traditions, healthy eating and exercise are usually the first things to go.



No one wants to be on a strict diet during the holidays. We want to enjoy the bounty of traditional favorite foods. How can you enjoy the holidays without gaining weight? Dietitians say it's not so hard, with a little planning. First, if you've been trying to lose weight, when mid-November rolls around, shift your focus from weight loss to weight maintenance. Second, if you are the host of dinners and parties, trim calories wherever you can without compromising tradition or flavor.

TIPS

- 1. Shop Smart for Healthy Holidays:** Plan your menu to include plenty of fruits, vegetables, lean meats, seafood, whole grains, and low-fat dairy. Consult the nutrition label to choose foods rich in nutrients but lower in fat, calories, and sugar. To shave calories, go easy when adding nuts, cheese, cream sauces, gravy, butter, and whipped cream.
- 2. Start the Party Light:** Most appetizers tend to be loaded with calories. Make it easier on your guests by offering light and satisfying appetizers. For tempting yet healthy appetizers, offer shrimp cocktails, whole-grain crackers with reduced-fat cheese, vegetables with a low-fat yogurt dip, or fresh fruit skewers.
- 3. Harness the Diet Power of Produce:** Add more simple vegetable and fruit dishes to your menu instead of heavy dishes with sauces. Your guests will fill up on healthy fiber without lots of extra calories.
- 4. Go Frozen in Winter:** Fresh is usually the best when fruits and vegetables are in season. But when prices are high in winter, head to the frozen food aisle. Canned foods can also be a healthy option. Read the nutrition labels to find fruits and vegetables with less added sodium and sugar,
- 5. Shave Calories with Simple Swaps:** Create healthier versions of your holiday favorites by shaving calories wherever you can. Use chicken stock, fat-free yogurt, light cream cheese, and low-fat milk in place of high-fat ingredients. Substitute non-fat yogurt or applesauce for oil in baked goods.
- 6. Roast or Grill for Rich Flavor With Fewer Calories:** Roasting or grilling meat, seafood, vegetables, and potatoes, is a simple, low-calorie cooking style that brings out the natural sweetness and flavor in foods. Roasted sweet potatoes with a sprinkle of cinnamon sugar and a spritz of butter spray are delicious substitutes for the traditional calorie-laden casserole.
- 7. Serve Healthier Desserts:** For dessert, try chocolate-dipped strawberries for a colorful and delicious finale. If you want to offer pie, choose the healthier pumpkin pie. Make it with non-fat evaporated milk. Top it with fat-free whipped topping.
- 8. Spritz Your Drinks:** Eggnog and other holiday beverages can add a huge number of calories. Offer your guests plenty of low-cal beverages such as diet soda, sparkling water, or a low-calorie punch. Alcohol releases inhibitions and can increase hunger. So do yourself and guests a favor: Offer simple alcohol choices such as wine and beer without the heavy cocktail mixers.
- 9. Plan and Scan to Avoid Holiday Weight Gain:** "In anticipation that you will be eating and drinking more than usual, try to trim your calories and make sure you fit in fitness everyday so you can enjoy a 'controlled' feast without the guilt" says Joan Salge Blake, MS, RD, clinical assistant professor, Boston University and American Dietetic Association spokeswoman. "Scan the buffet and fill your plate with foods that are simply prepared, without sauces or fried, sit down and take your time to taste and savor every bite," she says. Resist the urge to go back for more by waiting at least 20 minutes for your brain to register that you are comfortably full. If you are still hungry, eat more vegetables and drink water.

Remember, the holidays are marked with many traditions, but the real meaning is about spending time with family and friends.

If you keep these tips in mind, you'll get through the holidays without gaining a pound. And if you do splurge, don't beat yourself up, the experts say. Just get right back to normal eating and exercising, and try to do a better job at the next party.