

Spices and herbs intervention helps adults reduce salt intake

March 19 2014

Teaching people how to flavor food with spices and herbs is considerably more effective at lowering salt intake than having them do it on their own, according to research presented at the American Heart Association's Epidemiology & Prevention/Nutrition, Physical Activity & Metabolism Scientific Sessions 2014.

In the first phase of the study, 55 volunteers ate a low-sodium diet for four weeks. Researchers provided all foods and calorie-containing drinks. Salt is the main source of sodium in food.

In the second phase, half of the study volunteers participated in a 20-week behavioral intervention aimed at reducing their [sodium intake](#) to 1,500 mg/day by using [spices](#) and herbs. The other half reduced sodium on their own.

More than 60 percent of the participants in the study had high blood pressure, 18 percent had diabetes and they were overweight.

The researchers found:

- In the first phase, sodium intake decreased from an average 3,450 mg/day to an average 1,656 mg/day.
- In the second phase, sodium intake increased in both groups. But those who received the behavioral intervention consumed an average 966 mg/day of sodium less than the group that didn't receive the intervention.

"People in the intervention group learned problem-solving strategies, use of herbs and spices in recipes, how culture influences spice choices, how to monitor diet, overcoming the barriers to making dietary changes, how to choose and order foods when eating out and how to make low-sodium intake permanent," said Cheryl A. M. Anderson, Ph.D., M.P.H., lead author of the study and associate professor in the Department of Family and Preventive Medicine at the University of California San Diego.

Those assigned to the behavioral intervention group had cooking demonstrations and had a chance to share how they were changing traditional recipes to remove salt and include spices. The researchers didn't emphasize specific spices, and encouraged participants to try different things to find out what they liked most.

"Salt is abundant in the [food](#) supply and the average sodium level for Americans is very high—much higher than what is recommended for healthy living," Anderson said. "We studied the use of a [behavioral intervention](#) where people learn how to use spices and herbs and less salt in their daily lives."

"Given the challenges of lowering salt in the American diet, we need a public health approach aimed at making it possible for consumers to adhere to an eating pattern with less salt. This intervention using education and tasty alternatives to [sodium](#) could be one solution."

Provided by American Heart Association

Citation: Spices and herbs intervention helps adults reduce salt intake (2014, March 19) retrieved 20 April 2024 from

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