

Adding herbs and spices to meals may help lower blood pressure

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Seasoning your food generously with herbs and spices isn't just a great way to make your meals tastier—new research found it may have benefits for your heart's health, as well.

In a controlled-feeding study, the researchers found that seasoning foods with 6.5 grams, or about 1.3 teaspoons, of herbs and spices a day was linked with [lower blood pressure](#) after four weeks.

Penny Kris-Etherton, Evan Pugh University Professor of Nutritional Sciences, and Kristina Petersen, assistant professor of nutritional sciences at Texas Tech University and co-principal investigator of the study while at Penn State, said the findings offer people a simple way to help improve their heart health.

"Adding herbs and spices to your food is a great way to add flavor without adding extra sodium, sugar or saturated fat," Kris-Etherton said. "And, if you go a step further and add these seasonings to foods that are really good for you, like fruits and vegetables, you can potentially get even more health benefits by consuming that extra produce."

According to the researchers, cardiometabolic diseases like heart disease, strokes and type two diabetes continue to be one of the leading causes of death in the United States. One of the ways health professionals aim to improve heart health is by monitoring and improving blood pressure.

One way people can improve their blood pressure is by limiting their sodium intake, usually by adding less salt to their meals. Petersen said that while people have long been encouraged to season their food with herbs and spices instead of salt to boost flavor without added sodium, less was known about whether herbs and spices have health benefits of their own.

"As nutritionists, we're interested in new ways we can use diet to benefit health, and cardiovascular health in particular," Petersen said. "We were curious about how herbs and spices could affect heart [health](#), since they are versatile and can be added to many different types of food."

For the study, the researchers recruited 71 people with risk factors for heart disease. Every participant consumed every [spice](#) diet—one low, one moderate, and one high in herbs and spices—in a random order for four weeks each, with a two-week break between each diet period. Blood samples were drawn from each participant at the beginning of the study as well as after each diet period.

All three diets were based on an average American diet—reflective of what a typical American consumes in a day—but with three different doses of herbs and spices added. The low-dose, medium-dose and high-dose diets included approximately 0.5 grams, 3.2 grams and 6.5 grams of herbs and spices, respectively, a day.

The doses included a blend of 24 different herbs and spices, ranging from basil and thyme to cinnamon and turmeric, designed to simulate the way people use different herbs and spices throughout the day while cooking.

The researchers found that after consuming the diet including a high dose of herbs and spices, participants had lower systolic blood pressure than after the diet with the medium dose. Participants also had lower diastolic blood pressure after the diet with a high dose of herbs and spices than after the diet with a low dose.

Kris-Etherton said the results—recently published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*—were especially exciting to her because the diets in the study were not designed to be specifically heart healthy, and only differed from an average diet by the amount of herbs and spices added.

"I think it's really significant that participants consumed an average American diet throughout the study and we still found these results," Kris-Etherton said. "We didn't decrease sodium, we didn't increase fruits

and vegetables, we just added herbs and spices. It begs the next question that if we did alter the [diet](#) in these ways, how much better would the results be?"

The researchers said that in the future, additional studies designed to incorporate herbs and spices into a healthy dietary pattern lower in salt, added sugars and solid fats could help guide future dietary recommendations.

More information: Kristina S Petersen et al, Herbs and spices at a relatively high culinary dosage improves 24-hour ambulatory blood pressure in adults at risk of cardiometabolic diseases: a randomized, crossover, controlled-feeding study, *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* (2021). [DOI: 10.1093/ajcn/nqab291](https://doi.org/10.1093/ajcn/nqab291)

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