

How a Southern diet is connected to chronic diseases

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Warmer weather brings more opportunities for picnics, barbecues and gatherings around food. But before you reach for a second helping, consider if what you're eating may be increasing your risk for chronic

disease.

In a traditional Southern diet—highlighted by fried foods, organ meats, processed meats, eggs and egg dishes, sugar-sweetened beverages, and bread—the prevalence of high blood pressure in the African American population is higher according to Dr. Ivan Porter II, a nephrologist at Mayo Clinic. Dr. Porter explains [dietary changes](#) can have a significant impact on their blood pressure and overall health.

Fried chicken, macaroni and cheese, and sweet tea: "... Those tend to play a larger role in the Southern diet, and we know that those are associated with high blood pressure," says Dr. Porter.

That's because Southern cooking tends to be high in saturated fats, salts and loaded with added sugar—all risk factors for hypertension. And these excesses are major risk factors for heart disease, stroke, [vision problems](#) and kidney disease—huge problems in the African American community, says Dr. Porter.

"Forty-one percent of African Americans can have high blood pressure, compared with 27% of their white counterparts or Caucasians." Dr. Porter says it's time to change that.

"If you can change the way that you approach your diet, you can certainly change the impact that [high blood pressure](#) can have on your health."

But it doesn't mean fried chicken is completely off the menu. Everything must be in moderation.

Dr. Porter tells his patients to start change by eliminating one high-risk food at a time. "Look at the calories that they're getting from sugar-sweetened beverages and try to eliminate that as a start."

Provided by Mayo Clinic

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