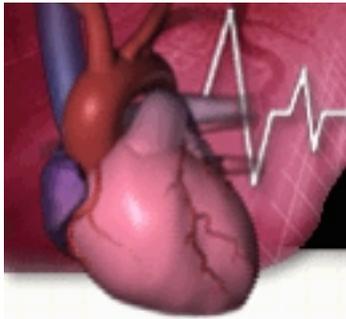


A Produce-Rich Diet Helps Keep Blood Pressure in Check

By [Cody Chan](#), | Health | 0 Comments



Many people haven't yet got the word that one of the keys to staying well is as close as their supermarket produce aisle. Health professionals continue to communicate that a varied diet that includes at least five daily servings of fruits and vegetables supplies healthy doses of disease-fighting antioxidants like vitamin C and beta-carotene. One reason these nutrients help reduce the risk of heart disease may be their moderating effects on blood pressure, a connection that was explored in a study at University of Oxford, UK.

For this analysis British researchers recruited 690 healthy adults, aged between 25 and 64. They all filled out a questionnaire designed to assess their usual diet and completed a medical check-up that included blood pressure reading and measurement of blood antioxidant levels.

Half the group then received individualized counseling on the importance of eating at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables a day.

Since about 80% of these people were not currently meeting this goal, they were provided with some practical suggestions on how to increase their intake of fruits and vegetables. This group was reminded several times during the 6-month study to eat a variety of produce every day. The rest of the participants (who served as a control, or comparison group) did not receive counseling; they were advised to follow their regular diet for the duration of the study.

At the end of six months, researchers again assessed diet, and measured blood pressure and blood antioxidant levels in all participants. They found that those who had been encouraged to eat more fruits and vegetables did so — from an average of 3½ servings to almost 5 servings per day. Blood levels of several key antioxidants — including vitamin C, beta-carotene, and lutein — increased accordingly.

Even more encouraging, blood pressure levels went down — an average of 4 points (or mm Hg) in systolic pressure (the top number) and an average of 1.5 points in diastolic pressure (the bottom number). On the other hand, those who didn't make any diet changes during the 6-month study saw no changes in either their blood antioxidant or blood pressure levels.

We already know that a diet that includes a variety of fruits and vegetables can help control blood pressure. While scientists are still working to discover why, they think that antioxidant nutrients — plentiful in fruits and vegetables — may be part of the answer. In addition, a diet that focuses on fruits and vegetables supplies potassium and magnesium; this type of diet also tends to be high in fiber and lower in fat. All of these factors may contribute to the blood pressure-lowering effect seen in this study.

Adding a few more servings of fruits and vegetables to your daily meals doesn't sound so difficult, but it can be hard to change long-standing eating habits. If you are someone who could use more variety in your diet, think about what you usually eat, and look for ways to work more produce into your daily meals.

A glass of orange juice or sliced strawberries at breakfast, lettuce and tomato on a sandwich at lunch, a tangerine for a mid-afternoon snack, and a small sweet potato and salad at dinner adds up to five servings.