

## BLOOD PRESSURE

By Julie Cottrell, MS, RD, LD

Do you know what your blood pressure number is? If so, note it here:

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ mm Hg ( \_\_\_\_\_ )  
date

This chart (right) plus other information about blood pressure can be found in this Healthline article:

[Everything You Need to Know About High Blood Pressure \(Hypertension\)](#)

BLOOD PRESSURE CATEGORY	SYSTOLIC (mm Hg)	DIASTOLIC (mm Hg)
Healthy	less than 120	and less than 80
Elevated	120–129	and less than 80
Stage 1 hypertension	130–139	or 80–89
Stage 2 hypertension	140 or higher	or 90 or higher
Hypertension crisis	over 180	or over 120

healthline

### Healthline Article | [17 Effective Ways to Lower Your Blood Pressure](#)

Click the link to read more about each of these options. Are there ways you can improve your blood pressure? Note that there are **MANY** options, it's not just about eating less salt!

- ❖ Increase activity and exercise more
- ❖ Lose weight if you're overweight
- ❖ Cut back on sugar and refined carbohydrates
- ❖ Eat more potassium and less sodium
- ❖ Eat less processed food
- ❖ Stop smoking
- ❖ Reduce stress
- ❖ Try meditation or yoga
- ❖ Eat dark chocolate
- ❖ Try medicinal herbs
- ❖ Get restful sleep
- ❖ Eat garlic/garlic supplements
- ❖ Eat healthy high protein foods
- ❖ Take BP-lowering supplements
- ❖ Drink less alcohol
- ❖ Consider cutting back on caffeine
- ❖ Take prescription medication

### SALT AND BLOOD PRESSURE

The role of salt/sodium on blood pressure is not as clear as once thought. Researchers are actually finding a "U-shaped curve" with respect to sodium and blood pressure. Folks whose intake is extremely low or extremely high have higher blood pressure than those with moderate intake. And eating more potassium helps to minimize the effect of salt on blood pressure (more information later in this handout). These articles below also highlight this point.

- ❖ Medical News Today | [High blood pressure: Sodium may not be the culprit](#)
- ❖ Health News from NPR | [Has Salt Gotten An Unfair Shake?](#)

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## PROCESSED FOODS AND RESTAURANT FOODS - the Real Culprit for Sodium

Sodium is usually high in **processed foods** as well as **restaurant and fast foods**. Cutting back on these will reduce your sodium intake by a lot or a little, depending on how frequently you are eating these foods. As you do this, it is possible that you could enjoy a little more salt along with your **home-cooked meals**. Sea salt is preferred to standard table salt. Himalayan and Celtic sea salt are both good options; Redmond's Real Sea Salt is another.

Check out this article by NPR:

[We Eat Too Much Sodium Because Companies Keep Dumping It In Our Food](#)

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## POTASSIUM AND BLOOD PRESSURE

Potassium functions in our body as an electrolyte; it helps the body regulate fluid balance, sends nerve signals and regulates muscle contractions. And its distinct role in **balancing out sodium** has huge implications for blood pressure management.

Studies find that people who consume **more potassium** have **lower blood pressures**, and those who consume the least amount of potassium have the highest blood pressures.

It seems that the **sodium-to-potassium ratio** (the amount of sodium we eat in relation to potassium) is a better way to evaluate the effect of excess salt on blood pressure. Eating more foods that contain potassium is a way to help balance this out. An article titled "[Beneficial Effects of High Potassium](#)" in the journal "Hypertension" discusses this point (excerpt from the end of the article):

### Summary and Conclusions

It is well recognized that higher levels of sodium intake are associated with elevated BP. Importantly, the effect of high sodium on BP is dependent on diet composition, specifically on the potassium content. It is clear that high dietary potassium is associated with a decrease in BP, particularly in the presence of a high-sodium diet.

Also check out these articles:

- ❖ Healthline Article | [What Does Potassium Do for Your Body? A Detailed Review](#)
  - ❖ Centers for Disease Control | [The Role of Potassium and Sodium in Your Diet](#)
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## FOOD SOURCES OF POTASSIUM

- Please see handout "**Potassium**" to find a visual chart of higher potassium foods. You can find this chart at [www.myfooddata.com](http://www.myfooddata.com).
- For those following **lower carb or keto diets**, this article from Perfect Keto provides a list of potassium foods that will fit your carb budget: [12 Potassium Rich Foods You Can Enjoy On Keto](#).

For reference, the top 10 are: **avocado, Brussels sprouts, mushrooms, summer squash or zucchini, pumpkin seeds, spinach and leafy greens, wild-caught salmon, clams, pork chops, and plain coconut water** (in moderation).

- The [Healthline article](#) above provides this list:  
Here's how much potassium you can get from eating a 3.5-ounce (100-gram) serving of foods rich in this mineral.
  - Beet greens, cooked: 909 mg
  - Yams, baked: 670 mg
  - Pinto beans, cooked: 646 mg
  - White potatoes, baked: 544 mg
  - Portobello mushrooms, grilled: 521 mg
  - Avocado: 485 mg
  - Sweet potato, baked: 475 mg
  - Spinach, cooked: 466 mg
  - Kale: 447 mg
  - Salmon, cooked: 414 mg
  - Bananas: 358 mg
  - Peas, cooked: 271 mg

**Julie's Note:** No matter what type of diet you are following, it seems wise to seek out more foods that contain potassium (refer to lists above) while avoiding foods that have excessive amounts of salt/sodium. Limiting processed foods and restaurant foods will go a long way toward this goal of having a more balanced intake of sodium and potassium. For home-cooked meals, you may be able to use a little more salt, preferably sea salt, which contains a range of minerals, including potassium.

## MAGNESIUM AND BLOOD PRESSURE

Magnesium also plays a valuable role in regulating blood sugar. Read this article "[10 Evidence-Based Health Benefits of Magnesium](#)" and visit the handout titled "[Magnesium](#)" to learn even more.

Other handouts/links to consider checking out @ [www.directaccess.md](http://www.directaccess.md)

All of these topics have the potential to impact blood pressure.

Look for the "Healthy Eating" tab to find these:

**Exercise Tips**

**Sleep: Your Reset Button**

**Stress Management**

**Protein: Prioritize It!**

**Carbs: Choosing the Best Ones**

**Time-Restricted Eating**

**Alcohol**