

## **Dietary treatment of high blood pressure**

High blood pressure increases your risk of heart disease and stroke. There are 2 minerals that can change your blood pressure: sodium and potassium.

**Sodium.** Eating high amounts of sodium can increase your blood pressure. Some sodium is found naturally in food but its main diet source is the kind added to food in processing. This includes foods that are in packages, cans, prepared meals and foods from Fast Food restaurants. Eating less of these foods will lower the amount of sodium in your diet. Most people with high blood pressure can add salt to the water to cook pasta, rice or potatoes. You can even add small amounts of salt to foods. You should eat less food that is in a package (crackers, cereals, cookies, snack foods, etc), canned (vegetables, pasta meals, etc), prepared meals and less foods from Fast Food restaurants to lower your sodium intake.

**Potassium.** All vegetables and fruits contain potassium. Eating a diet high in potassium, or eating more fruits and vegetables, will help to decrease your blood pressure. A serving of both vegetables and fruits is ½ cup; a serving of leafy greens, such as lettuce or spinach, is 1 cup. Most pieces of fruit are 2 servings. The DASH study (**D**ietary **A**pproaches to **S**top **H**ypertension) found that eating 9 servings of fruits and vegetables a day would lower blood pressure. Nine servings can be easily consumed if you have a piece of fruit at breakfast and lunch; then 2 servings of vegetables lunch (for example: 2 cups of salad) and then 2 to 3 servings of vegetables at dinner. You can eat fresh, canned or frozen vegetables and fruits. Canned fruit should be packed in juice or water. Canned vegetables that are either low-salt or without added salt are healthier. If you buy ones with salt in the water you can either drain them or rinse the salted water off the vegetables.

**Extra virgin olive oil.** Studies have shown that using about 2 tablespoons a day of extra virgin olive oil (EVOO) can lower blood pressure. A great way to use extra virgin olive oil is to prepare vegetables. You should use 1 tablespoon of EVOO per cup of vegetables. EVOO will make the vegetables taste better. Because fat is needed in order for our bodies to absorb the health promoting nutrients in vegetables, using EVOO makes vegetables healthier. As of January 2016, most of the EVOO sold in retail stores in the US coming from other countries is not really EVOO. California makes some very good extra virgin olive oils, however, and is widely available in retail stores.