Potassium Supplementation Reduces Blood Pressure

Previous research has associated low potassium intake with higher rates of hypertension and related complications. In a study recently published in the British Journal of Nutrition, researchers at King’s College London found that a daily supplement of potassium is effective in reducing blood pressure.*

The double-blind, placebo-controlled trial enrolled 59 volunteers who were randomly assigned to receive either 24 mmol/day (approximately 1.8 grams) of a slow-release potassium chloride supplement or placebo. Six weeks later, mean arterial pressure was reduced in the potassium-supplemented group by 7.01 mmHg, systolic blood pressure was lowered by 7.60 mmHg, and diastolic blood pressure dropped by 6.46 mmHg. The researchers concluded that a daily dietary supplement of potassium, equivalent to the content of five portions of fresh fruits and vegetables, induces a substantial reduction in mean arterial pressure, similar in effect to single-drug therapy for hypertension.

Editor’s Note: Anyone taking this much potassium should have their doctor monitor blood potassium levels.

—Carmia Borek, PhD

B Vitamins Lower Dangerous Homocysteine Levels

Elderly people are more likely to have B-vitamin deficiencies than younger people. While diet plays an important role, the elderly’s greater use of prescription drugs and lower vitamin bioavailability also contribute to these deficiencies. In addition, the activity of enzymes involved in vitamin metabolism declines 25% between the ages of 18 and 90. Because homocysteine is a risk factor for coronary artery disease—and one that increases with advancing age—scientists are exploring how B vitamins may influence homocysteine levels.

Researchers at Germany’s University of Hanover evaluated the dietary intake and blood status of 178 German women aged 60 to 70 years old.* The study participants completed a three-day diet record that assessed their energy and nutrient intakes. This was compared to the corresponding recommended dietary allowance (RDA) for older women. Blood samples

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were drawn after an overnight fast and used to measure the levels of thiamine (B1), riboflavin (B2), pyridoxine (B6), cobalamin (B12), folate, and homocysteine.

Riboflavin intake was sufficient for the most part, with only 2% of the study participants below the RDA. By contrast, more than 82% of the women had a folate intake below the RDA. Blood levels of cobalamin, thiamine, and pyridoxine were below the respective RDAs for these vitamins in 42%, 29%, and 17% of the women, respectively. Plasma homocysteine was dramatically elevated in 17% of the study participants. Because the subjects had above-average levels of education, the researchers speculated that poor B-vitamin status might be even more prevalent in the general population.

This study found significantly higher homocysteine levels when both folate and cobalamin were low. Supplementation with B vitamins is therefore advisable, as is a follow-up test of homocysteine levels to ensure that your vitamin intake is appropriate.

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**Resveratrol Investigated as Treatment for Lung Disease**

Researchers at the National Heart and Lung Institute in London, England, are examining resveratrol as a possible treatment for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, a condition usually caused by cigarette smoking. No effective treatment currently exists for this progressive disease.

Preliminary data indicate that resveratrol may work better than dexamethasone, a corticosteroid drug sometimes used to treat chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. When resveratrol was added to lung cells taken from people with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, inflammatory factors were reduced 79-94%. While both resveratrol and dexamethasone inhibit inflammation that damages lung cells, only resveratrol blocks IL-8, a factor that is highly elevated in patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Moreover, resveratrol, unlike dexamethasone, has no side effects. Researchers say the only drawback involving resveratrol is achieving and maintaining sufficient levels of this phyto-vitamin in the lungs.

Resveratrol is emerging as an important agent in the prevention and treatment of several serious conditions. Scientific studies have documented its anti-inflammatory effects, from reversing inflammatory damage to blood vessels to halting the spread of cancer.

—Terri Mitchell

References
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