

## - Hypertension

# What to eat when you have high blood pressure

Learn about the 52100 advocacy

Manila Bulletin · 17 May 2022 · B-9 · POTassium is KEY Potassium-rich food helps lower blood pressure

The Philippine Heart Association reported an alarming 37 percent increase in the prevalence of hypertension among Filipinos in 2021. The highest recorded since 1992. High blood pressure was more prevalent among the male population (52 percent) compared to women (48 percent).



The fourth report by the Philippine Heart Association was based on the Study of Hypertension (presyon) among 2,796 individuals conducted across 13 regions between January to April last year. Results of the study conducted showed a 72 percent prevalence of hypertension among the elderly population, while a smaller percentage of five percent comes from adolescents with ages ranging from 12 to 18.

Former Philippine Heart Association president and cardiologist, Dr. Jorge Sison emphasized the role of genetics; lifestyle including lack of exercise or being sedentary due to hours spent on gadgets, as well as consumption of high fat, high salt, carbohydrate-rich fast food; stress, and the effect of the pandemic on the increased blood pressure.

In an online forum held last year, Dr. Sison said, “It looks like it is really unstoppable. I do believe with or without Covid, the progression of prevalence really is consistently increasing.” He also shared those individuals with hypertension have higher Body Mass Index or BMI, waist circumference, and central obesity rate. Said characteristics are the same regardless of age.

“What is bad is the awareness, the treatment profile, the compliance, the control rate are low. That’s the reason why cardiovascular diseases related to hypertension really is the leading cause of morbidity, mortality,” Dr.

Sison said after the study showed only 87 percent treatment compliance rate among hypertensive patients.

In an effort to address this pressing health concern, the Philippine Heart Association urged the public to join its “52100” advocacy. The advocacy includes consumption of five servings of fruits and vegetables a day, two hours of screen time, one hour of moderate physical activity, zero intakes of sugary and sweetened beverages, and zero smoking and exposure to secondhand smoke.

Following the guidelines given on consuming five servings of fruits and vegetables a day, let us explore the types of fresh produce that further enhance heart health and aid in controlling blood pressure. Needless to say, all fruits and vegetables contain phytochemicals or plant chemicals that help reduce inflammation, especially in the lining of arteries where blood flows, as well as fiber which helps maintain normal cholesterol and triglycerides—both of which are associated with blood pressure. However, there are specific fruits, vegetables, and plant sources that better enhance blood circulation and lower blood pressure by decreasing sodium retention.

Potassium-rich fruits and vegetables help the body flush out sodium through the urine. Sodium is a major component of salt and high consumption of this mineral can raise one’s blood pressure. Therefore, it is vital to avoid highly processed and high sodium foods like instant noodles, chips, processed and canned meats, and the like. Make sure to intentionally incorporate any of the following potassium-rich food in your daily intake: Banana, guava, jackfruit or langka, orange, kamatsili, santol, lanzones, melon, kamias, guyabano, cashew, balimbing, anonas, strawberry, prunes, raisins, celery, mushroom, malunggay, squash, calamansi, cauliflower, coconut, avocado, beans, legumes, and all varieties of leafy vegetables.

As a precaution for individuals with kidney problems, consult with your doctor regarding your potassium level as this can increase with a compromised kidney function. Once you know your potassium level, consult a registered nutritionist dietitian on how much potassium food sources you can have in a day.

Aside from the conventional fruits and vegetables that we are familiar with, two functional foods have heart health benefits beyond basic nutrition. The first one is non-GMO and food-grade soy and soy products. Studies have shown that consumption of soybean resulted in the reduction of both systolic and diastolic blood pressure.

The second functional food that has been used for centuries to manage hypertension is hawthorn (*Crataegus* spp.). This shrub’s blood pressure-lowering effect can be attributed to nitric oxide-mediated vasodilatation. It simply means that the production of nitric oxide in the body causes the blood vessels to widen and relax, thus promoting better blood circulation and lower blood pressure. Hawthorn commonly comes in modified forms like pill or powdered. It is best to always consult a functional nutritionist dietitian for proper guidance before taking any form of modified functional foods and other supplementation.

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