Worth your Weight in Salt?

We all know one of the first recommendations a heart doctor makes to his/her patient when ailing is a reduction in sodium.

So, why then is the Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA) of sodium 1500mg when the human body requires 220mg of sodium per day? The answer: The Salt Institute secured a G.R.A.S. rating "generally recognized as safe" through the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) before processed foods became a way of life. This means there is no limit to the amount of salt that can be added to food and implies that it is not hazardous to health, when it is a well known fact that a person will die if they drink sea water (diluted salt) and consuming excess salt was a common way of committing suicide in ancient China. In fact, as little as one ounce of salt can be a lethal dose and yet the average American consumes 1/4 - 1/3 ounce of salt per day. Keep in mind the salt industry, in 1990, was worth more than $50million annually and has grown by more than 12% per year.

90% of the American diet receives its sodium from salt instead of from whole fresh foods, which provide ample supply of the RDA of sodium. Table salt does not provide the same benefit as naturally sodium rich fruits and vegetables which help balance the body's electrolytes.

High levels of sodium and low levels of potassium cause heart disease, hypertension, strokes, kidney stones, osteoporosis, and even death. Salt overload additionally increases the risk of high blood pressure, heart failure, kidney disease, diabetes, cataracts, asthma, ulcers, stomach cancer, dementia and more.

An essential part of understanding the cause of disease caused by high levels of sodium is to consider the sodium/potassium balance within the body. Together, these two minerals assist to regulate heart beats, help transmission of nerve signals, contraction of muscles, are crucial in the functioning of the kidneys, regulating fluid, and maintaining cardiovascular health and the acid base balance in the body. Potassium plays a vital role by eliminating sodium from the cells and preventing the accumulation of excess fluids in the cells, which may cause cells to swell and ultimately burst due to pressure.

When you consider the amount of sodium rises sharply when foods like tomatoes and potatoes are processed or cooked and the natural potassium in these foods declines considerably, worsening the sodium-potassium ratio, you have a recipe in the making for illness.

The average American consumes more sodium than the RDA, between 2,500—7,500mg per day, a staggering average of 4,000mg per day. We consume 10 times more sodium than our ancestors did at 700mg and yet only a fraction of the potassium they consumed at upwards of 11,000mg per day. Today, average potassium intake has been reduced to a mere 2,500mg per day, while the RDA is 4,700mg per day.

The hormone aldosterone produced by the adrenals regulates the vital sodium and potassium balance. Ingestion of table salt stops the production of aldosterone and causes the body to shed salt. It takes two months after the ingestion of salt is halted for the adrenals to begin production again. The best way to stimulate aldosterone production is through an increase in potassium and the omission of overt salt. Fruits and vegetables are a rich source of potassium. In their natural state, most will contain sodium and potassium in exactly the ratio that is best suited for the human body. Does it make sense to increase the consumption of these healthy and balanced foods?

The salt industry would lead you to believe that specialized salt (such as Hawaiian or Mediterranean sea salt, Himalayan pink salt, etc.) contains vital minerals that only salt provides when all of the minerals necessary to support the human body are provided through eating a simple whole foods diet.

Dr. Henney, who is a public health specialist at the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine and chairman of the Institute of Medicine report, has stated it is time to modify the G.R.A.S. status of salt because it can no longer be considered safe under current conditions of use. Such a modification would allow the FDA to limit the amount of salt that can be used commercially in preparing food. The report stated that "population-wide reductions in sodium could prevent more than 100,000 deaths annually."

Maybe you think you don't have to worry about salt? After all, you don't have high blood pressure, you feel good, you are not overweight and you exercise regularly. Perhaps you will think again? Are you slowly poisoning yourself with salt?

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