

# Dr. Marlene's NATURAL HEALTH CONNECTIONS

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## The Top 3 Killer Myths about Blood Pressure

**Avoiding bad dietary advice is the key to controlling blood pressure naturally, without the adverse effects of medications.**

If you're over age 60, the odds are two-to-one against you when it comes to blood pressure.<sup>1</sup> I don't like to be alarming, but there's no other way to put it. At this stage of life, more than 67 percent of Americans have hypertension, and only half have it under control.

At any age, blood pressure levels are a shocking problem. If you look at everyone age 18 or older in this country, nearly half have high blood pressure. There are no telltale symptoms, and many people don't know their blood pressure is high.

The good news is, you can beat those odds. The things you can do go against conventional wisdom, but they're simple and don't cost a lot.

When new patients arrive in my office, many either have high blood pressure or are taking medication to control it. Even with several hypertension drugs, it can be a struggle. But with the right changes in diet, I've seen every one of them lower their blood pressure naturally, and eliminate the need for drugs.

### Why It Matters

Among people who have their first heart attack or have chronic heart failure, 7 in 10 have high blood pressure, as do 8 in 10 of those who have a stroke.<sup>2</sup> And that's not all.

High blood pressure damages arteries, making it more likely that harmful cholesterol will get lodged in artery walls. It can narrow arteries in your arms and legs, reducing circulation and making you tire out more easily. It contributes to kidney disease, vision loss, chest pain, and sexual problems. It leads to erectile dysfunction in men, and in women it reduces the desire for sex.<sup>3</sup>

### MYTH #1: The Cause is Usually Unknown

In conventional medical terms, the cause of high blood pressure is unknown in nine of ten cases. (In the others, there are underlying health conditions such as kidney disease.) But in fact, there is clear scientific evidence that most, if not all, the mysterious cases could be resolved

with changes in diet, even when genes seem to be against you.

One of my patients is a perfect example of someone whom most doctors would put on blood pressure medication for the rest of his life. He’s genetically at very high risk for hypertension and was taking medication when he first came to see me.

His diet was terrible. He was consuming a lot of sugar, eating out a lot, and was overweight. I explained why he needed to eat less sugar, and we worked out how to realistically make the changes.

Last week, he came in for a second visit, 20 pounds lighter. He was so diligent in eating the right foods, even I was amazed. When I checked his blood pressure, it was completely normal, without any medication. He wasn’t on any kind of weight-loss diet. By cutting out a lot of sugar, the blood pressure dropped naturally, and so did the weight.

**Sugar Causes Hypertension**

Your doctor probably hasn’t told you to stop drinking soda or sweet coffee concoctions to lower your blood pressure, so this might surprise you. But it’s true. It’s well known that diabetics tend to have higher blood pressure, but the underlying science is mostly ignored.

A study of 2,696 people, here and in the United Kingdom, found that sweetened drinks drive up blood pressure.<sup>4</sup> Another study of 810 people, led by Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center in New Orleans, found that having fewer sweetened drinks lowers blood pressure.<sup>5</sup> And the problem goes beyond sweet drinks.

**How to Measure Blood Pressure**

Blood pressure varies during the day and rises in times of stress. Going to the doctor can be stressful enough to make it go up, and it happens so often that it’s called “white coat” hypertension. As you get older, this is more likely to happen.

If your pressure is high at the doctor’s office, get a home monitor

with a cuff that goes around your upper arm. Don’t rely on gadgets that measure pressure on your wrist, as these haven’t been proven to be accurate. Learn to use the monitor correctly and check your pressure several times, at various times of day, for about a week. If it’s consistently high, then it’s time to make changes.

**What Blood Pressure Numbers Mean**

The top, or systolic, number measures pressure against artery walls each time your heart beats. The bottom, or diastolic, number measures pressure between beats, when the heart is resting.

Blood pressure numbers are given in “mm Hg.” It’s an abbreviation for millimeters of mercury, used in traditional blood pressure meters, much like mercury in thermometers.

When blood pressure is above normal, here’s how the numbers affect risk, according to the American Heart Association: Between the ages of 40 and 89, risk of death from narrowed arteries and stroke doubles with every 20 mm Hg increase in the top number or 10 mm Hg increase in the bottom number.

BLOOD PRESSURE CATEGORY	TOP NUMBER (systolic pressure)		BOTTOM NUMBER (diastolic pressure)
Normal	Less than 120	and	Less than 80
Elevated (at risk for high blood pressure)	120-129	and	Less than 80
High blood pressure stage 1	130-139	or	80-89
High blood pressure stage 2	140 or higher	or	90 or higher
Crisis: see a doctor right away	Higher than 180	and/or	Higher than 120

Whelton, P.K., et al. “2017 ACC/AHA/AAPA/ABC/ACPM/AGS/APhA/ASH/ASPC/NMA/PCNA Guideline for the Prevention, Detection, Evaluation, and Management of High Blood Pressure in Adults: Executive Summary: A Report of the American College of Cardiology/American Heart Association Task Force on Clinical Practice Guidelines.” Hypertension. 2017 Nov 13.

Your body uses carbohydrates the same way it uses sugar. As a result, a high-carbohydrate diet drives up blood pressure.

## The Underlying Mechanism

Studies show that most people with hypertension have an underlying problem with insulin.<sup>6</sup> You might recall that insulin is a hormone your body makes when you eat sugar and carbohydrates. It enables that fuel to be used for energy, but when there's too much, things go wrong.

Years of carbohydrate and sugar overload train your body to produce too much insulin, until it's chronically high. Insulin promotes fat storage and fluid retention and disrupts other hormones.

Insulin raises cortisol, the stress hormone, and estrogen, in both women and men. Cortisol and estrogen increase fluid retention and raise blood pressure.

Yes, the inner workings of your body are complex. But there's a simple way to control the process: Eat foods that keep your insulin at healthy levels. I'll be more specific about how to do that in a moment.

## MYTH #2: Salt Is Bad for You

"I know I need to eat less salt." I hear that all the time when I first see a patient with high blood pressure, but too much sodium generally isn't the cause.

Some people are more sensitive to salt than others, but salt isn't the monster it's made out to be. In fact, the daily sodium limits recommended by the government and various health organizations conflict with science and can harm your health.

## ALERT: Eating Too Little Salt Can Harm You

The conventional advice is that healthy people should eat no more than 2,300 mg of sodium daily, and most people over age 50 should eat no more than 1,500 mg. But eating so little salt can increase your risk of death, with or without high blood pressure.

A study of more than 130,000 people from 49 countries, led by Canadian researchers, found this: Eating less than 3,000 mg of sodium daily increases risks for heart attacks, strokes, and deaths.<sup>7</sup>

Danish research looked at 25 other studies that, altogether, tracked more than 274,000 people. The results were published in the *American Journal of Hypertension*. The evidence shows that the average amount of sodium we consume in this country, between 2,645 and 4,945 mg per day, leads to better health and less risk of death than the lower sodium limits recommended by the government.<sup>8</sup>

The same studies also found that it's harmful to eat more than the average amount of salt. Like many things, a certain amount is good, but more is not better.

## Salt Sensitivity

For a small percentage of people, considered "salt sensitive," blood pressure does rise in response to salt. However, it isn't likely to be the biggest driver of hypertension.

No one knows how many people are salt sensitive, because no one has defined exactly what it means, and there's no simple test.

If you're concerned about salt, be aware that over 70 percent of it comes from processed food. Meals prepared with fresh ingredients

and the salt shaker at the table contribute minor amounts.

Potassium deficiency is a bigger issue. See page 6 for why and how to solve the problem.

## The Best Salt

Natural sea salt is more flavorful and nutritious than regular table salt, which is mined from the ground and refined. Sea salt contains an array of minerals. Look for one that's unrefined. It should be gray or pink in color, and the label should say it contains minerals.

### Dr. Marlene's NATURAL HEALTH CONNECTIONS

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### MYTH #3: Blood Pressure Drugs Fix the Problem

Blood pressure drugs can save lives, especially in emergencies. But in the long term, relying on medications becomes difficult and risky. More drugs are often added, and they become less effective.

For some, these drugs provide more benefit than harm. But there are many others who could and should be controlling their blood pressure naturally.

Drugs are aids, rather than a complete solution to the risks posed by high blood pressure. Drug marketing leads you to believe that medications make you healthier. They don't.

### What Blood Pressure Drugs Do to Your Body

As you probably know, there's a lengthy list of side effects. These can include nausea, a pounding heart, headaches, bloating,

blurred vision, a nasty dry cough, constipation, diarrhea, stomach upset, skin rashes, and many more. A lot of people stop taking these drugs because of side effects.

But there's another, underlying one. It won't be listed on a handout from the pharmacist, but it's the elephant in the room.

Despite their differences, blood pressure drugs share an underlying common thread: They make the heart do less work to pump blood. While this is good in an emergency, it's bad for your health in the longer term.

The heart is a muscle. Like other muscles, it gets weaker without enough exercise. If your heart does less work for a decade or more, it's going to be significantly weaker than a heart that's been pumping normally all that time.

### Greater Benefit or Risk?

This is always the biggest question with any drug or treatment. With

blood pressure drugs, the answer varies. Someone with critically high blood pressure may be in grave danger, and drugs may have unpleasant side effects but save that person's life.

In other situations, the drugs may do more harm than good. I've seen this in my practice for years, but don't just take my word for it.

Researchers in Canada looked at clinical trials of more than 8,900 people with stage 2 hypertension: a top number of 140-159 and/or a bottom number of 90-99. Some were taking medications, while others were taking a placebo, for 4 to 5 years. Among those taking drugs, 9 percent stopped because of side effects.

Here's the shocker: Compared to a placebo, blood pressure drugs did not reduce heart disease, heart attacks, or stroke.<sup>9</sup> The researchers concluded that the drugs in these trials "have not been shown to reduce mortality or morbidity."

### Vital Nutrients Get Depleted

Another problem with blood pressure drugs is that they deplete essential nutrients, including these:

- B vitamins you must have to turn food into energy.
- Essential minerals, such as calcium, magnesium, potassium, phosphorus, and zinc, which are used in hundreds of different processes, such as contracting and relaxing all your blood vessels and muscles, including the heart.
- CoQ10, which is essential for the heart to generate energy.
- Vitamin C, a vital antioxidant you can't live without.

### About Dr. Marlene

Dr. Marlene Merritt's passion for natural medicine is fueled by her drive to help others, and her own experience of overcoming a debilitating heart condition, diagnosed at the age of 20. A competitive cross-country cyclist at the time, she suddenly began experiencing severe chest pains. Forced to quit the sport, she suffered from extreme fatigue and constant pain for another 15 years, despite doing everything that conventional, Western medical doctors told her to do.

And then, the tide turned. A physician trained in naturopathic healing recommended a whole-food vitamin E supplement. A week after starting the supplement regimen, her energy began to return, and the pain began to disappear.

Dr. Marlene is a Doctor of Oriental Medicine, has a Master's in Nutrition, and is an Applied Clinical Nutritionist. She is Board Certified in Bariatric Counseling, and certified in the Bredesen MEND Protocol,<sup>TM</sup> a groundbreaking method of reversing Alzheimer's disease. She sees patients at the Merritt Wellness Centers in Austin, Texas, and Santa Fe, New Mexico, trains health practitioners nationwide, and is the author of the *Smart Blood Sugar Solution* and the *Blood Pressure Solution*.



What You Can Do

To lower blood pressure naturally, the most important thing is to make some simple changes to your diet. Exercise will also help. Take a walk now and then, and be more active around the house.

Make Simple Food Changes

Start by cutting out white foods: white bread, buns, cereal, and rice. It's a simple idea that does a body a lot of good. And eat real, fresh food as much as possible instead of processed stuff in packages or cans. If you like sweetened drinks, view them as an occasional treat rather than a staple. If you like

bubbly drinks, squeeze a little fresh lemon juice into plain mineral water or add a dash of flavored liquid stevia. The stevia has no calories and no effect on insulin.

Take These Supplements

Multivitamins contain essential nutrients, but many tablets don't break down in your system, and the nutrients don't get absorbed. Capsules break down more easily than tablets. I recommend taking a multivitamin with between 100 and 200 percent of the recommended daily amount of all the essential vitamins and minerals plus concentrated

vegetables or mushrooms. Look for food-based ingredients, which you're most likely to find in a health food store. CoQ10 is a nutrient that isn't in multivitamins but is needed by your heart. Some blood pressure drugs and all cholesterol-lowering statin drugs deplete it. Take 100 to 200 mg daily, with a fatty food for best absorption.

Get Your Insulin Checked

Routine check-ups don't include an insulin test, but you can ask your doctor for one. It's a blood test. A healthy insulin level is under 6. If it's high, it's time to cut back on carbohydrates and sugar, and be more physically active.

Drugs Deplete Nutrients

These are some of the classes, or types, of blood pressure drugs, and nutrients they deplete. I'm including these as examples, not as a complete list. There are other classes, each of which includes many different brand name and generic drugs—too many to list here. Doctors often prescribe more than one type of drug, and some drugs are combinations. If you take blood pressure drugs and don't know the type, ask your pharmacist or doctor.

CLASSES OF BLOOD PRESSURE DRUGS	NUTRIENTS DEPLETED
Beta Blockers	CoQ10
Potassium Sparing Diuretics	Calcium, zinc, folic acid
Thiazide Diuretics	CoQ10, magnesium, potassium, phosphorus, sodium, and zinc.
Loop Diuretics	Calcium, magnesium, potassium, sodium, vitamin B1, vitamin B6, vitamin C, and zinc.
ACE Inhibitors	Zinc, sodium
Centrally Acting Drugs	CoQ10
CHOLESTEROL-LOWERING STATIN DRUGS	CoQ10

LaValle, J.B: Consequences of Cardiovascular Drug-Induced Nutrient Depletion, pp.369-404. Sinatra, S.T., (Editor) Houston, M.C., (Editor). Nutritional and Integrative Strategies in Cardiovascular Medicine. CRC Press 2015.

<sup>1</sup> Benjamin, E.J., et al. "Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics-2018 Update: A Report from the American Heart Association." Circulation. 2018 Mar 20;137(12):e67-e492.

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "High Blood Pressure Facts." www.cdc.gov/bloodpressure/facts.htm. Accessed May 7, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> American Heart Association. "Health Threats from High Blood Pressure." http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/HighBloodPressure/LearnHowHBP HarmsYourHealth/Health-Threats-From-High-Blood-Pressure\_UCM\_002051\_Article.jsp. Accessed May 7, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Brown, I.J., et al. "Sugar-sweetened beverage, sugar intake of individuals, and their blood pressure: international study of macro/micronutrients and blood pressure." Hypertension. 2011 57: 695–701.

<sup>5</sup> Chen, L., et al. "Reducing consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages is associated with reduced blood pressure: a prospective study among United States adults." Circulation. 2010 Jun 8;121(22):2398-406.

<sup>6</sup> DiNicolantonio, J.J., "The wrong white crystals: not salt but sugar as aetiological in hypertension and cardiometabolic disease." Open Heart. 2014 Nov 3;1(1):e000167.

<sup>7</sup> Mente, A., et al. "Associations of urinary sodium excretion with cardiovascular events in individuals with and without hypertension: a pooled analysis of data from four studies." The Lancet. 2016 Jul 30;388(10043):465-75.

<sup>8</sup> Graudal, N., et al. "Compared with Usual Sodium Intake, Low- and Excessive-Sodium Diets Are Associated With Increased Mortality: A Meta-Analysis. American Journal of Hypertension. 2014 Sep;27(9):1129-37.

<sup>9</sup> Diao, D., et al. "Pharmacotherapy for mild hypertension." The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews. 2012 Aug 15;(8):CD006742.

# The Potassium Crisis

Potassium is vital for maintaining normal blood pressure, but on average we consume just over half the recommended daily amount.



It's also essential for a healthy brain, nervous system, heart, muscle function, and strong bones. Lack of potassium can contribute to low energy, muscle weakness, and cramps.

In our bodies, sodium and potassium work together and must be balanced. Potassium is in vegetables and other fresh foods but not in processed foods, which are high in sodium. So, there's a critical lack of potassium in our diets. And, some diuretic drugs deplete it.

If we eat plenty of vegetables and other plant foods, it's quite realistic to get enough potassium from our food. Supplements are not a practical solution because government regulations do not allow more than 99 mg of potassium per serving.

## Studies Prove Benefits

In studies, researchers have used high-dose supplements to measure the effects of potassium. When results of 33 studies were analyzed, it turned out that taking 2,400 mg of potassium daily (by prescription) effectively lowered blood pressure.<sup>1</sup>

Another study of 43,000 men, at the Harvard School of Public Health, found that those who got about 4,300 mg daily, from food, were about 60 percent as likely to have a stroke as those who got only 2,400 mg daily.<sup>2</sup>

Researchers at Tufts University, in Boston, tracked diets of older men and women for four years, and measured their bone density. Eating more vegetables and fruits, which provide potassium, improved bone density in both older women and men.<sup>3</sup>

Doctors may prescribe high-dose potassium supplements when the mineral is depleted by drugs. But some diuretics for high blood pressure are "potassium sparing," meaning they stop excretion of potassium. Anyone taking such diuretics should not take even low-dose potassium supplements.

## How to Eat Enough Potassium

The daily recommended amount of potassium is 4,700 mg. On average, most American diets contain only about 2,600 mg.

Take a look at the potassium content of various foods and aim to include plenty of fresh vegetables in your daily meals, and to regularly eat fish. Try to steam vegetables, rather than boiling in water, to preserve nutrients.

FOOD	PORTION SIZE	POTASSIUM (MG)
Baked Potato w/skin	1 medium	941
Beet Greens	½ cup	654
White Beans	½ cup	595
Baked Sweet Potato	1 medium	542
Salmon	3 ounces	534
Canned Clams	3 ounces	534
Tomato Juice	1 cup	527
Swiss Chard	½ cup	481
Lima Beans	½ cup	478
Mackerel	3 ounces	443–474
Yellowfin Tuna	3 ounces	448
Acorn Squash	½ cup	448
Banana	1 medium	422
Cooked Spinach	½ cup	370–419
Rainbow Trout	3 ounces	381–383
Avocado	½ cup	364
Kidney Beans	½ cup	357
Sunflower Seeds	1 oz	241
Almonds	1 oz	200

USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference, Release 27.

<sup>1</sup> Gaby, AR. Nutritional Medicine. Concord, NH: Fritz Perlberg Publishing, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Ascherio, A., et al. "Intake of potassium, magnesium, calcium, and fiber and risk of stroke among US men." *Circulation*. 1998 Sep 22;98(12):1198-204.

<sup>3</sup> Tucker, K.L., et al. "Potassium, magnesium, and fruit and vegetable intakes are associated with greater bone mineral density in elderly men and women." *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. 1999;69(4):727-736.



# Liver: Nature's Superfood

Liver used to be one of the meats we ate on a regular basis, and Olympic athletes in the 1950s used it as a supplement to enhance endurance. It's an exceptionally rich source of essential vitamins and minerals that we need for a healthy metabolism and stable levels of physical and mental energy. When we eat liver, the nutrients are easily absorbed.

Vitamin B12 is especially important. It's necessary for a healthy brain and nervous system, and a deficiency becomes more common as we get older. Lack of B12 can lead to fatigue, brain fog, memory lapses, confusion, and muscle weakness.

There's a myth that the liver stores toxins. It doesn't. Toxins are stored in fat and the liver is a very lean organ. Although organic meat is always a good choice, it's better to eat regular liver than none at all.

Keep in mind that your taste buds need to experience a new food between 8 and 16 times to develop a taste for it. So give liver a chance. To start, try adding some ground calf's liver to meatloaf or burgers.

## Make Your Own Liver Supplements

Freeze raw calf's liver for two weeks, to kill any possible pathogens. Then grate a little into

vegetable smoothies, tomato juice, or Bloody Mary mix.

## Chicken Liver and Bacon Pâté

Enjoy this pâté as a snack on celery sticks, lettuce leaves, or directly off the spoon, since it's so good on its own.

### Ingredients:

5 slices bacon, chopped  
 ½ large onion, diced  
 1 leek, washed and chopped (or more onion)  
 1 clove garlic, minced  
 ½ cup coconut oil  
 ½ lb. chicken livers  
 ½ cup bacon fat (I save all my bacon fat in the fridge)  
 1 Tbs. apple cider vinegar (or more to taste)  
 2 or more tsp. dried parsley or small handful of fresh parsley  
 Small handful of cilantro (optional)  
 2 tsp. coriander  
 Salt and pepper to taste  
 ½ tsp. nutmeg (optional)  
 Broth or water, a few tablespoons

### How to make it:

1. Heat a large pan to medium high heat and cook the bacon for about 3 minutes.
2. Add the onion, leeks, garlic, and ¼ cup of the coconut oil and soften for another 3 or 4 minutes.
3. Add the livers to the pot and cook



for about 7 to 10 minutes with a little more of the bacon fat.

4. Once cooked through, add the rest of the oil and fat. Then add vinegar, parsley, cilantro, and coriander, and salt, pepper, and nutmeg to taste.
5. Remove from heat, allow to cool to a safe temperature, and pour mixture in a blender or food processor and blend until smooth. You may need to add a touch more liquid. Broth works nicely, about 2 tablespoons at a time, or you can use water. Taste to see if it needs more spices or vinegar.
6. Pour the smooth mixture into a serving dish.
7. Cover and put in the refrigerator to cool until the fat hardens.

## Why Liver Is a Superfood

### Compared to red muscle meat, liver contains:

1,335X more vitamin A  
 21X more vitamin B2 (riboflavin)  
 4X more vitamin B3 (niacin)  
 10X more vitamin B6 (pyridoxine)  
 60X more vitamin B12  
 19X more vitamin D  
 3X more iron

### Compared to an apple, liver contains:

18X more folic acid  
 4X more vitamin C  
 3X more magnesium  
 80X more iron

### Compared to a carrot, liver contains:

83X more vitamin B2  
 6X more folic acid



## 7 Surprising Benefits of Gardening

The benefits of gardening go beyond making an outdoor environment look attractive. So much so that British researchers recently suggested that it could become a prescription for older people. Even for those who are physically unable to go out and work in a garden, just sitting at a window and looking at a garden can improve health and well-being.<sup>1</sup>

Gardening is a pleasant way to get some exercise. And, studies have found that people who garden are:<sup>2</sup>

- Less anxious
- Happier
- More satisfied with their lives
- Mentally sharper
- Less stressed
- More energetic
- Thinner

If you don't have a garden or want some company, there are community gardens. To find a community garden in your area, visit the American Community Gardening Association at [www.communitygarden.org](http://www.communitygarden.org).

## Beware of Baking Soda News

Headlines about health research can be misleading, and even harmful. One of these, about baking soda, caught my attention because it got a lot of coverage online. A study at the Medical College of Georgia, in Augusta,<sup>3</sup> found that baking soda can reduce destructive inflammation in autoimmune diseases like rheumatoid arthritis. What a great discovery, you might think, but there's more you need to know.

You may be familiar with baking soda as a remedy for indigestion and heartburn. It works by reducing stomach acid. The problem is, lack of stomach acid is a major reason why many people experience digestive problems, especially as they get older. It's one of those things that goes against the grain of conventional wisdom but happens to be true. Health professionals who address underlying causes of disease often deal with this issue, and I see it in my practice all the time.

If your body doesn't produce enough stomach acid, you can't break down food and digestion goes awry. Even worse, lack of stomach acid prevents you from



absorbing minerals like calcium, magnesium, copper, zinc, and iron, and vitamin B12. Lack of B12 can lead to anemia. I've seen patients who are anemic because they take proton pump inhibitors—heartburn drugs that suppress stomach acid—and can't absorb B12. In research, there's a very strong link between these drugs and osteoporosis.

Lowering stomach acid, with baking soda, antacid pills, or heartburn drugs, does bring temporary digestive relief but it also perpetuates difficulties and can lead to bigger problems. The real solution for digestive troubles and autoimmune diseases usually requires a dietary overhaul, rather than a pill or powder. I'll get into more specifics in future issues of this newsletter, but meanwhile I do not recommend taking baking soda on a regular basis.

## Older Surgeons = Fewer Deaths

When surgeries are performed by older surgeons, patients are less likely to die, according to a study of nearly 900,000 Medicare patients by the University of California Los Angeles and several other institutions.<sup>4</sup> Death rates were 6.6 percent for surgeons aged 40 and younger, 6.5 percent for those 40 to 49 years old, 6.4 percent for surgeons aged 50 to 59 years, and 6.3 percent for surgeons age 60 and older. When comparing male and female surgeons across those four age groups, females in their 50s had the lowest patient death rate.



# Drug Ads Are Getting Worse

Don't be misled into thinking that TV advertising of prescription drugs is designed to inform you about your options. The latest study of its effects, led by the University of South Florida in Tampa, found this simply isn't the case. "Direct-to-consumer advertising continued to promote prescription drugs above educating the population," researchers concluded.<sup>5</sup>

It isn't enough that the recitation of side effects is way too fast to make an impression. An analysis of 61 drug ads on 4 major cable TV networks found this:

- Ads mostly target your emotions rather than conveying facts about a disease
- They emphasize leisure activities you can presumably enjoy by taking the drug
- Today's ads are conveying

less information about health conditions than in the past

- Only 7 percent of ads include any information about alternative ways to treat the condition

The American Medical Association has called for a ban on direct-to-consumer advertising of prescription drugs. Beside New Zealand, we are the only country in the world that allows such ads. Meanwhile, drug manufacturers just keep increasing their consumer ad spending, to more than \$6 billion in 2016.

Drug ads portray idyllic scenes of a happy life. If that's what you want, I encourage you to learn about all your options. And remember that eating the right foods and being physically and socially active set the stage for a healthy, happy, and rewarding life.

# 4 Good Foods for Osteoarthritis



After analyzing 68 studies on how food affects osteoarthritis, researchers at the University of Surrey, in the United Kingdom,<sup>6</sup> identified these four as especially beneficial:

- Fish oil, 1 gram a day, reduces pain. You can take a supplement or make a habit of eating fish. Sardines, mackerel, tuna, and salmon are good sources.
- Kale, spinach, and parsley provide vitamin K, necessary for healthy cartilage and bones.

# At a Loss for Words? Get Moving

With age, we're more likely to struggle to find words to express ourselves. The words are on the tip of your tongue, but you can't quite verbalize them. This isn't usually a sign that you're losing your wits or "getting old." It's more likely that you need to move more, in a way that gets your heart pumping. A study of older people, at the University of Birmingham in the United Kingdom, found that the tip-of-the-tongue situation is linked to aerobic fitness, rather than age.<sup>7</sup> In fact, older people have bigger vocabularies than the young.



<sup>1</sup> Husk, K., et al. "Prescribing gardening and conservation activities for health and wellbeing in older people." *Maturitas*. 2018 Apr;110:A1-A2.

<sup>2</sup> Soga, M., et al. "Gardening is beneficial for health: A meta-analysis." *Preventive Medicine Reports*. Nov 14;5:92-99.

<sup>3</sup> Ray, S.C., et al. "Oral NaHCO<sub>3</sub> Activates a Splenic Anti-Inflammatory Pathway: Evidence That Cholinergic Signals Are Transmitted via Mesothelial Cells." *The Journal of Immunology*. 2018 May 15;200(10):3568-3586.

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<sup>5</sup> Applequist, J., et al. "An Updated Analysis of Direct-to-Consumer Television Advertisements for Prescription Drugs." *Annals of Family Medicine*. May/June 2018 vol. 16 no. 3 211-216.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas, S., et al. "What is the evidence for a role for diet and nutrition in osteoarthritis?" *Rheumatology (Oxford)*. 2018 May 1;57(suppl\_4):iv61-iv74.

<sup>7</sup> Segal, K., et al. "Higher physical fitness levels are associated with less language decline in healthy ageing." *Scientific Reports*. 2018 Apr 30;8(1):6715.

# Q&A

**Q:** I've tried different diets and I lose a few pounds, but then I gain them back. I'm wondering, could it make a difference if I eat organic foods? — *Georgina K.*

**A:** Whenever possible, it's always preferable to eat organic foods, because you avoid residues of toxic pesticides and herbicides. But I suggest taking a slightly different approach. Aim to eat what I call "real foods." By that, I mean fresh fish or meat and fresh vegetables, cooked from scratch, instead of foods that come in boxes, bags, or cans.



If you buy foods in packages, even if they're organic, they're still processed to some degree, and are more likely to be higher in starch and sugar, carbohydrates that make it difficult for your body to burn excess fat and prevent you from losing weight.

When you eat only real foods and eliminate processed foods, it helps your body to eliminate toxins

and excess water. I've seen people drop 7 to 10 pounds quite quickly just by doing this.

There's a lot of attention paid to calories, but the quality of the calories you eat makes an enormous difference in how your body metabolizes the food.

Unfortunately, a lot of so-called diet-friendly packaged foods contain a variety of artificial ingredients to add flavor and texture while keeping the calorie or carb count low. Real food contains more nutrients that enable you to use food as fuel instead of storing it as fat.

It might take some getting used to at first, and you'll need to experiment with some recipes to find your favorite ones, but it's well worth it. And it's a realistic way to make lasting changes that will help you lose weight and keep it off.

**Q:** I was recently diagnosed as prediabetic. My doctor gave me a handout that said I should eat 45–60 grams of carbohydrates per meal, but your *Smart Blood Sugar Solution* book says that I should eat only 60 grams of carbs per day. Why is there such a big difference? — *Tom W.*

**A:** The recommendation you received comes from the American Diabetes Association. Unfortunately, it doesn't work. It's possible to reverse prediabetes, but not by eating 45–60 grams of carbs per meal.

My recommendation is no more than 60 grams of carbs per day, from a specific list of foods such as breads and other grain foods, beverages, starchy vegetables,

beans, and fruit. You can see the complete list on page 4 of my first newsletter (Volume 1, Issue 1). I don't recommend that you count carbs in everything you eat — only in the foods on that list. It's a practical, realistic approach that works for all my patients.

I don't suggest limiting green and other non-starchy vegetables, or completely eliminating entire food groups.

I do recommend eating no more than 30 grams of carbs, from that list, in a single meal or snack. That way, you can get and maintain levels of blood sugar in a healthy range naturally.

I base my recommendations on two things: Science, which is described in that same newsletter issue, and my clinical experience. It's sad, but the conventional recommendations that you received will keep you in a state of prediabetes. Over time, levels of blood sugar will keep rising and will eventually lead to a diagnosis of full-blown type 2 diabetes.

## Do you have a question for Dr. Marlene?

Send your health-related questions to [drmarlene@naturalhealthconnections.com](mailto:drmarlene@naturalhealthconnections.com). Please include your first name and the initial of your last name. Although she cannot answer each question directly, Dr. Marlene will select a few in each newsletter and will address other questions and concerns in articles in future issues. Answers are intended for educational purposes only and should not be viewed as medical advice.