

More Herbs, Less Salt

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Did you know that herbs offer numerous health benefits in addition to increasing flavor in foods and beverages? In contrast, eating too much sodium (which is a mineral that's found in salt) can raise your risk of high blood pressure, heart disease, and stroke.

According to the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, our bodies do require a small amount of sodium each day for vital functions like contracting and relaxing muscles. However, most Americans consume far more than is needed. According to the American Heart Association, over 70% of the sodium we eat is from packaged, prepared, and restaurant foods. This means that it isn't just coming from our salt shakers (although an estimated 11% of the sodium we eat does come from the salt we add in while cooking or while food is on our plates).



So, what can you do to reduce your sodium intake? Try buying low-sodium food options at the grocery store, tasting your food before deciding to add salt, eating more fresh fruits and vegetables (which are naturally salt-free), and using herbs and spices to flavor foods instead of salt.

In addition to reducing sodium intake, the last option in that list also has the added benefit of providing other health benefits! What exactly are the health benefits of consuming herbs and spices? To start, many herbs and spices contain antioxidants which help our bodies fight off chronic diseases. Some (such as turmeric) contain anti-inflammatory compounds which combat inflammation. Furthermore, some herbs and spices (such as cinnamon, clove, cumin, oregano, and thyme) contain antibacterial and antifungal compounds. Finally, there are some (like ginger) which can be used as an antiemetic agent to prevent vomiting. Chamomile and peppermint also have anti-nausea properties. To learn more, visit bit.ly/EatMoreHerbs.

Interested in learning even more about the health benefits of cooking with herbs and how you can grow your own herbs at home? The Southwind Extension District is hosting an educational program which will cover all of this and more this spring! The program, entitled "Herbs - From Plant to Plate," will be offered at the 4-H Community Building in Yates Center on April 5th at 6 PM and at Buck Run Community Center in Fort Scott on April 6th at 12 PM.

For more information, please contact Clara Wicoff at clarawicoff@ksu.edu or 620-365-2242.