



Steals and Deals: Save up to 75% on holiday entertaining essentials >

HEALTH & WELLNESS

New research finds certain foods and drinks may lower blood pressure

When it comes to better blood pressure, what you do eat (and drink) is as important as what you don't.



— “Flavanols may improve blood pressure by favorably impacting the hormones that regulate and control blood pressure,” said Howard Sesso. Jacqueline Veissid / Getty Images

Nov. 10, 2020, 12:45 PM EST

By Karen Ansel, M.S., R.D.N.

About 45% of Americans have high blood pressure, or hypertension, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Yet only 1 in 4 has it under control, which leaves the majority at an increased risk of heart attack, stroke and kidney failure. Now, a new British study of 25,000 people reports that a diet rich in compounds called flavanols may help reduce blood pressure. And the higher a person's blood pressure is, the more effective flavanols may be.

The study was funded by the Medical Research Council and the National Institute for Health Research in the U.K. and Mars, the maker of M&M's and other candy brands. Mars is also the employer of two of the study authors.

Women's blood pressure rises faster and earlier, new study shows



What are flavanols, anyway?

Even though you might not have heard of flavanols before, you probably consume them every day. These naturally-occurring compounds are found in lots of plant-based foods and drinks, especially:

- Berries
- Apples and pears
- Broccoli, spinach and kale
- Onions and scallions
- Nuts
- Red wine
- Tea
- Cocoa

Related

HEALTH & WELLNESS

5 foods to help lower blood pressure



How do flavanols help with blood pressure?

“Flavanols may improve blood pressure by favorably impacting the hormones that regulate and control blood pressure,” Howard Sesso, an associate professor of epidemiology at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health in Boston, who was not affiliated with the study, told TODAY. However, foods can vary wildly in their flavanol content. Take tea for example, which can contain anywhere from 10 and 600 milligrams of flavanols per cup. Because of this, researchers usually estimate flavanol consumption by asking people to recall everything they typically eat. That has a big downside.

“Self-reporting always relies on study participants to remember and record their food intakes correctly,” said Gunter Kuhnle, a professor of food and nutritional sciences at the University of Reading outside of London, who led the study. “But we know from many previous studies that this is not always the case, especially since people usually over-report eating foods they think are healthy yet underreport those that aren’t as good for them.”

Related



HEALTH & WELLNESS

Uncontrolled high blood pressure in U.S. is getting worse, study finds

This study was different. In addition to scrutinizing people’s diets, researchers also measured markers of flavanol consumption in the volunteers’ bodies. “Nutritional biomarkers, such as those evaluated in this study, are more objective and have the potential to provide high-quality evidence for nutrients on blood pressure and other outcomes,” said Sesso. So even though this is not the first study to find a link between flavanol intake and lower blood pressure, it may be the most accurate.

How effective are flavanols?

The study participants who consumed the most flavanols had blood pressure readings that were 2 to 4 mmHg lower than those who took in the fewest flavanols. That’s similar to the reduction a person would achieve by following the Mediterranean diet or the DASH diet. But it’s not as much as the roughly 10mmHg drop that a person would get from taking antihypertensive medication, says Kuhnle. Better blood pressure, however, isn’t the only reason to eat more flavanol-rich foods. These potent compounds may also protect against Alzheimer’s disease and they’ve been linked to improved memory, attention and mental processing.

What are the best blood pressure-lowering foods?

In this study, volunteers obtained most of their flavanols from apples, tea, red wine, berries and chocolate. Does that mean it's okay to load up on chocolate? Not exactly. "It's important to note the difference between cocoa and chocolate," says Sesso. "Cocoa is a rich source of flavanols, but chocolate is not, as cocoa flavanols are often destroyed during chocolate processing." Perhaps that's why a recent study found that eating cocoa-rich chocolate has no impact on blood pressure or other markers of heart health.

Recommended



HEALTH & WELLNESS

"Two-way street": CDC report says masks protect wearers and everyone else



HEALTH & WELLNESS

Romaine lettuce recalled after possible E. coli contamination

A better strategy? Eat lots and lots of fruits and veggies. Not only are they packed with flavanols, they also deliver plenty of other blood pressure-lowering nutrients like potassium, magnesium and calcium.

Karen Ansel, M.S., R.D.N.

Sponsored Stories

by Taboola

APITAL ONE SHOPPING

If you're going to buy Bath and Body Works, read this

RI GENETICS DIGEST

New Method Traces Ancestry Back Thousands of Years

SPONSORED / CAPITAL ONE SHOPPING

If you're going to buy Bath and Body Works, read this

SPONSORED / CRI GENETICS DIGEST

New Method Traces Ancestry Back Thousands of Years

SPONSORED / CAPITAL ONE SHOPPING

The Genius Hack Every Home Depot Shopper Should Know

SPONSORED / DR. MARTY

5 Signs That Something Is Wrong Inside Your Dogs Body

SPONSORED / THE EASY BLOG BY EASYBREATHE.COM

Skip the Doctor - Upgrade to AirSense 10 Auto CPAP Today

SPONSORED / CURIOUS FINDS

22 Holiday Gifts You'll Regret Not Getting Before They Sell Out

SPONSORED / FORGE OF EMPIRES

Challenge Your Brain With This Must-Play Strategy Game. No Install.

SPONSORED / BOMBAS SOCKS

They've Arrived: New Bombas Sesame Street Socks

SPONSORED / HERO WARS

Many failed before. Will you complete the trial?

SPONSORED / NATIONAL PENNY TECH REVIEW

These Are The 23 Hottest Gadgets Of 2020

SPONSORED / VSHRED

60 Seconds Quiz Will Tell You Your Body Type & Best Diet

SPONSORED / FIRSTLEAF

Our \$5 Wines Are Better Than Most \$50 Wines

SPONSORED / FINANCE DAILY

All Massachusetts Drivers Should Claim This Reward in November (Check if You Qualify)

SPONSORED / RESTOFINISHER

One Simple Trick To Refinish Kichen Cabinets

More From NBC News

TODAY / GAMES

Oprah's Favorite Things 2020 is here – and we want everything on the list

TODAY / STYLE

David Beckham vows 'revenge' on Victoria Beckham after sharing embarrassing pic

TODAY / POPCULTURE

'Jeopardy!' producer talks Alex Trebek's 'nice final day' before his death

SPONSORED / BREAST CANCER | SEARCH ADS

Red Flag Signs of Metastatic Breast Cancer

SPONSORED / QUICK MEDIGAP

Are you on Medicare? Claim This Benefit By December 7th

SPONSORED / DR. KELLYANN

How To Flush Out Your Gut (1 Minute Routine)

SPONSORED / AMERICAN STANDARD

Need A New Shower? Check Out This Deal From American Standard

TODAY / HEALTH

'Make small changes': Couple reveals what it took to lose a combined 200 pounds

TODAY / POPCULTURE

Susan Kelenchi Watson announces she is 'single' again after engagement last year

TODAY / HEALTH

What is the Master Cleanse? And is it a healthy way to lose weight?



[ABOUT](#)

[VISIT](#)

[TODAY STORE](#)

[TODAY APPS](#)

[TERMS OF SERVICE](#)

[PRIVACY POLICY](#)

[DO NOT SELL MY PERSONAL INFORMATION](#)

[CA NOTICE](#)

[COUPONS](#)

[CONTACT](#)

[CAREERS](#)

[CLOSED CAPTIONING](#)

[SITEMAP](#)

[ADVERTISE](#)

[AD CHOICES](#)

© 2020 NBC UNIVERSAL

