

Research Shows Eating More Fruits and Vegetables Cuts Kidney Patients' Medicine Expense in Half

High blood pressure is one of the leading causes of kidney disease. When blood pressure is too high, blood vessel walls can thicken and become stiff which can also damage organs throughout the body such as the kidneys. Not only can high blood pressure damage kidneys, but kidney disease can lead to high blood pressure. If kidneys are damaged and can no longer make an enzyme known as renin, blood pressure can be elevated.

With continued emphasis on managing and even preventing chronic conditions to improve overall health, research is continuing to occur to find effective interventions to treat conditions such as high blood pressure. Recently, we reported on the DASH diet and how a diet low in red and processed meat, sodium and sugary beverages but high in nuts, legumes, whole grains, fruits and vegetable can lower blood pressure and lower the risk of kidney disease. Similar research was just released by the American Heart Association.

According to a study presented at the American Heart Association's High Blood Pressure 2016 Scientific Sessions, people with kidney disease who added more fruits and vegetables to their diet had improved blood pressure and cut their medicine expenses nearly in half. Dr. Nimrit Goraya, study author, believes the results are remarkable given no major dietary changes were required of the participants. Instead of having people change their diet completely, the study provided participants with food for the entire family, so they could add fruits and vegetables to what they normally eat.

Diseased kidneys are less able to eliminate acid from the body, which increases the acid levels in the blood. These increased acid levels, called metabolic acidosis, will lead to higher blood pressure. In ESRD patients, these acids are neutralized by the dialysate. In CKD patients, they are typically prescribed sodium bicarbonate to neutralize the acids in their blood. In this study, researchers compared patients who controlled their blood pressure with acidosis treatment (sodium bicarbonate) to patients who did not receive acidosis treatment but increased intake of fruits and vegetable. All patients were treated with medications to reduce their systolic blood pressure.

Researchers found:

- After 5 years, the average systolic blood pressure was lower (125 mm Hg) in the fruit and vegetable group than in patients receiving sodium bicarbonate (135 mm Hg) or no acidosis treatment (134 mm Hg).
- Although all groups started the study taking similar doses of common blood pressure drugs, by the end daily doses were lower in the fruit and vegetable group than in patients receiving sodium bicarbonate or no acidosis treatment.
- The average 5-year drug cost for maintaining blood pressure was nearly half in the fruit and vegetable group (\$79,760) than the sodium bicarbonate (\$155,372) or no treatment groups (\$152,305).

?In the long run, adding 3-4 servings of fruits and vegetables to the diet reduces blood pressure and lets people take fewer blood pressure drugs, reducing their medical costs,? Goraya said.

These recent findings suggest simple lifestyle changes can make a huge impact on the overall health of kidney patients.

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