Potassium: The Often Overlooked Mineral in Blood Pressure Maintenance

Welcome, my name is Margery Swan and I’m currently a dietetic intern at the University of Maryland. For my podcast today, I will be discussing the importance of potassium, and the role it plays within the body.

Potassium is a naturally occurring mineral that is essential to the body. It not only plays a crucial role in maintaining electrolyte balance and muscle contraction, but also can have an impact on blood pressure. As you can see potassium is an important mineral and thus the RDA or recommended dietary allowance is currently set at 4,700mg per day. Foods high in potassium include potatoes, tomatoes, apricots, raisins, nuts, seeds, bananas, dairy products, beans and lean meats.

However, despite the wide variety of potassium containing foods, according to the most recent NHANES survey less than five percent of American adults met the recommended 4,700 mg of potassium on a daily basis. Compare this with the fact that over 99% of US adults exceed the recommended sodium intake per day. Clearly, there is an imbalance of sodium and potassium. In fact, some researchers have hypothesized that a low potassium intake may be a risk factor for developing high blood pressure.

Potassium intake can be complicated further due to the diuretic use in patients who already have high blood pressure. Diuretics make the body excrete more water and therefore more sodium, but along with this potassium can be excreted. Therefore it is important to monitor your serum potassium levels while on diuretics and be cautious of low potassium signs such as muscle cramps, fatigue, and heart arrhythmias. If your body excretes too much potassium, while on diuretics, your doctor may prescribe a potassium supplement.

While potassium supplements may maintain blood potassium levels, it is better to obtain natural potassium sources if possible. This is because there is a growing body of evidence that a high intake of potassium may not only help lower high blood pressure, but may prevent a person from developing it in the first place.

So, I hope you’ve enjoyed this podcast regarding potassium and its possible effects on blood pressure. For additional resources check out the American Heart Association’s website at [www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org) or the International Food Information Council Foundation website at [www.foodinsight.org](http://www.foodinsight.org)