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5 heart-healthy foods that lower blood pressure

Janet Bond Brill, a registered dietician, offers the best foods to lower blood pressure.

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Registered dietitian Janet Bond Brill.

By: **Paul Irish** Living reporter, Published on Tue Apr 30 2013

Without a hint of pain or discomfort, high blood pressure damages blood vessels, the heart, even your brain.

Many people don't know they're living with it until it's too late and suffer a heart attack or stroke.

Registered dietitian Janet Bond Brill says it's now a worldwide epidemic. She offers the five best foods to lower your blood pressure from her new book, *Blood Pressure Down*.

Cantaloupe. Cantaloupe is high in potassium, which counteracts the sodium that raises our blood pressure. Diets should contain plenty of magnesium, potassium and calcium — but stay away from supplements. "They just aren't as effective as the real deal," says Brill. "Fresh fruits and vegetables are always the best."

Spinach. Brill says it's a quick and easy way to get loads of magnesium. She usually buys a 10 oz. bag, pops it in the microwave and serves as is. "If you haven't acquired a taste for it — like a lot of people — try cooking it in a frying pan using extra virgin olive oil and adding a bit of fresh garlic," she says. Magnesium ions promote cellular relaxation, which ultimately reduces blood pressure.

Plain non-fat yogurt. The calcium in yogurt helps prevents the inner arterial walls from constricting, which increases blood pressure. "Getting a good dose of calcium is like doing yoga for the heart," Brill says. "Try to eat two cups a day."

Soy beans. Brill says recent research suggests half a cup a day of salt free roasted soybeans (also called soy nuts) cuts blood pressure as much as medication for some people. The legume's special protein produces nitric oxide, which in turn relaxes the blood vessels, lowering blood pressure. "Dry-roasted soy nuts can't be beat for a low calorie, tasty snack," she says. "They're exceptionally high in protein, practically sodium free and have a low glycemic index."

Dark chocolate. This sweet inhibits the enzyme that increases blood pressure. "Keep in mind that it's the cocoa component of chocolate that contains that active ingredient, flavonoids — so the higher the percentage of cocoa solids, the more flavonoids," Brill says. "Choose the dark chocolate that's highest in cocoa mass, even if you have to sacrifice some of the taste." When in doubt, check the packaging for ingredient content.

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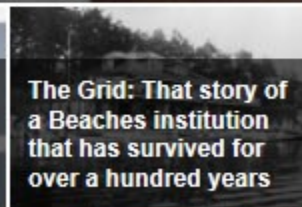
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