HOME

8 Common Food Preservatives Linked to Higher Blood Pressure and Heart Disease Risk, Major Study Finds

By bestfolkmedicine · 07/11/2026 · 12 min read



A large study involving more than 112,000 adults has raised new concerns about ingredients hiding in everyday packaged foods. Researchers identified eight commonly used preservatives associated with an increased risk of high blood pressure, and one was also linked to cardiovascular disease.

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You check the calories. You look at the sugar. Maybe you even compare the sodium before placing a product in your shopping cart.

But how often do you read the smaller ingredients printed near the bottom of the label?

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Those unfamiliar names and numbers may deserve more attention than previously thought.

A major French study published in the *European Heart Journal* in May 2026 has found associations between several widely used food preservatives and cardiovascular health problems.

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Researchers followed more than 112,000 adults for approximately seven to eight years, examining their diets and tracking the development of hypertension and cardiovascular disease.

The findings suggest that frequent exposure to certain preservative additives may be associated with greater cardiovascular risk.

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And some of the ingredients researchers identified may already be sitting in your kitchen.

What Did the Researchers Discover?

The study was part of France's NutriNet-Santé research program, a large investigation examining relationships between diet and long-term health.

Scientists analyzed dietary information from 112,395 adults, with an average age of approximately 42 years.

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Participants periodically completed detailed food records, allowing researchers to estimate their exposure to preservatives from various foods and beverages.

During follow-up:

- 5,544 participants developed high blood pressure.
- 2,450 experienced cardiovascular disease events.

- Nearly all participants had consumed at least one food preservative during the initial dietary assessment period.

The researchers compared people with different levels of preservative consumption while accounting for several factors that might influence cardiovascular health.

The results raised important questions.

People consuming the highest amounts of non-antioxidant preservatives had a **29% higher relative risk of developing hypertension** and a **16% higher relative risk of cardiovascular disease** compared with those consuming the lowest amounts.

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Higher consumption of antioxidant preservatives was associated with a 22% greater relative risk of hypertension.

These percentages describe relative differences between groups, not the absolute probability that an individual will develop disease.

Although the study identified concerning associations, it did not prove that preservatives directly caused high blood pressure, heart attacks, or strokes.

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The 8 Food Preservatives Researchers Identified

Among the commonly consumed additives investigated, eight were individually associated with increased hypertension risk.

Here is what consumers should know about them.

1. Potassium Sorbate (E202)

Potassium sorbate is widely used to prevent mold and yeast growth.

It helps extend the shelf life of packaged foods and beverages.

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Where it may be found:

- Packaged baked goods
- Certain cheeses
- Sauces and dressings
- Some fruit-based beverages
- Processed spreads

The researchers found an association between higher potassium sorbate intake and hypertension.

This does not establish that an occasional food containing potassium sorbate will raise blood pressure.

The potential concern involves patterns of consumption over time.

2. Potassium Metabisulphite (E224)

Potassium metabisulphite belongs to a group of additives called sulfites.

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These substances are used to prevent spoilage, discoloration, and unwanted microbial growth.

Where it may be found:

- Certain dried fruits
- Some fruit preparations
- Wine and other beverages
- Selected processed foods

Sulfites are also relevant because some people, particularly those with sulfite sensitivity, can experience adverse reactions.

However, sulfite sensitivity and cardiovascular risk are different issues.

The new research investigated associations between dietary exposure and long-term health outcomes rather than immediate allergic-type reactions.

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3. Sodium Nitrite (E250)

Sodium nitrite is one of the most recognizable preservatives used in processed meats.

It helps control dangerous bacterial growth and contributes to the characteristic color and flavor of cured meat products.

Where it may be found:

- Bacon
- Hot dogs
- Ham
- Sausages
- Certain deli meats

Sodium nitrite deserves particular attention because processed meat consumption has already been associated with adverse health outcomes in previous research.

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However, processed meats contain numerous ingredients, including sodium and saturated fat, that may influence overall cardiovascular risk.

The new findings do not prove that sodium nitrite alone explains these associations.

4. Ascorbic Acid (E300)

This ingredient may surprise readers.

Ascorbic acid is another name for vitamin C, an essential nutrient naturally found in fruits and vegetables.

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Food manufacturers also use ascorbic acid as an antioxidant additive to prevent oxidation and maintain product quality.

Where it may be found:

- Packaged fruit products

- Processed beverages
- Certain baked goods
- Preserved food preparations

In the French study, higher intake of ascorbic acid as a food additive was associated with hypertension and cardiovascular disease.

But this distinction is essential:

The results do not suggest that vitamin C-rich foods such as oranges, strawberries, or bell peppers are harmful to your heart.

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The researchers examined dietary patterns involving additives in manufactured foods.

The findings cannot establish whether ascorbic acid itself, the foods containing it, or other associated dietary factors explain the observed relationship.

There is no reason to avoid naturally occurring vitamin C based on this research.

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5. Sodium Ascorbate (E301)

Sodium ascorbate is a sodium salt of ascorbic acid.

It is used as an antioxidant and can help maintain the color and quality of processed food products.

Where it may be found:

- Certain cured meats
- Processed meat products
- Some packaged food preparations

Researchers identified an association between sodium ascorbate exposure and hypertension.

However, the presence of sodium in the chemical name does not automatically mean that the additive contributes large amounts of dietary sodium.

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The amount consumed and the overall nutritional composition of the food are important considerations.

6. Sodium Erythorbate (E316)

Sodium erythorbate is commonly used alongside other preservatives, particularly in meat processing.

It helps reduce oxidation and preserve product characteristics.

Where it may be found:

- Processed sausages
- Bacon
- Certain cured meats
- Other commercially preserved meat products

In the study, higher exposure was associated with increased hypertension risk.

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Because sodium erythorbate often appears in foods containing several other additives, separating its individual effects from the wider dietary pattern remains challenging.

7. Citric Acid (E330)

Citric acid is naturally present in citrus fruits, including lemons and limes.

It is also widely manufactured for use as a food additive.

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In processed products, citric acid helps regulate acidity, preserve flavor, and improve stability.

Where it may be found:

- Soft drinks
- Packaged fruit beverages
- Candies

- Sauces
- Certain canned foods

Citric acid was among the additives associated with hypertension in the research.

But that does not mean eating lemons or other citrus fruits increases blood pressure.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(146); });
Naturally occurring citric acid in whole fruit is consumed within a very different nutritional context from additives in ultra-processed products.

The findings should not be interpreted as a reason to avoid citrus fruits.

8. Rosemary Extracts (E392)

Rosemary is widely recognized as a culinary herb used in Mediterranean cooking.

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Its extracts can also function as antioxidants in commercially manufactured foods.

Where it may be found:

- Packaged snacks
- Certain meat products
- Processed foods containing fats and oils
- Some sauces and prepared meals

Rosemary extracts appeared among the preservatives associated with higher hypertension risk.

This finding does not mean that cooking with fresh or dried rosemary is dangerous.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(148); });
A concentrated food additive and a small amount of culinary rosemary are not necessarily consumed at comparable levels or within similar dietary patterns.

Further research is needed to determine what the association actually means.

Why Would Food Preservatives Affect Blood Pressure?

Scientists are still investigating potential biological explanations.

Several mechanisms have been proposed, although none were established as the cause of the study's findings.

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Oxidative Stress

Oxidative stress occurs when reactive molecules overwhelm the body's antioxidant defenses.

Excessive oxidative stress can contribute to cellular damage and may interfere with normal blood vessel function.

Researchers are investigating whether certain food additives affect oxidative balance under specific exposure conditions.

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Chronic Inflammation

Persistent low-grade inflammation is involved in the development of cardiovascular disease.

Some experimental studies suggest that particular food additives may influence inflammatory pathways.

However, experimental findings do not necessarily translate into harmful effects at ordinary dietary exposure levels.

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Changes in Blood Vessel Function

Healthy blood vessels expand and contract to help regulate blood pressure.

Damage to the endothelium, the inner lining of blood vessels, can interfere with this process.

Scientists are exploring whether certain environmental and dietary exposures influence endothelial function.

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The Gut Microbiome

The intestinal microbiome plays a role in metabolism, immune regulation, and various aspects of cardiovascular health.

Some food additives have been investigated for their potential effects on gut bacteria.

Whether the preservatives identified in this study influence blood pressure through microbiome changes remains uncertain.

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Does This Mean All Preservatives Are Dangerous?

No.

Preservatives serve important food safety functions.

They can help prevent the growth of dangerous microorganisms, reduce food waste, and protect consumers from foodborne illness.

Some additives are chemically identical to substances naturally present in food.

Their health effects may depend on the amount consumed, individual susceptibility, the food containing them, and other dietary factors.

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Moreover, observational research can identify associations but cannot conclusively establish cause and effect.

People consuming more preservatives may also consume more ultra-processed foods, sodium, refined carbohydrates, or saturated fat.

These differences can complicate the interpretation of results.

The study raises legitimate scientific questions, but it does not justify labeling every preservative as harmful.

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7 Practical Ways to Reduce Unnecessary Food Additives

The good news is that improving your diet does not require expensive supplements, complicated detox programs, or avoiding every packaged product.

A few practical habits can make a meaningful difference.

1. Read Ingredient Labels More Carefully

Look beyond the front-of-package marketing claims.

Compare ingredient lists and choose simpler products when possible.

Remember that a longer ingredient list does not automatically mean a product is unhealthy, but it can provide useful information about additives.

2. Reduce Processed Meat Consumption

Try replacing frequently consumed bacon, hot dogs, and processed deli meats with less processed protein sources.

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Depending on personal preferences, suitable alternatives may include eggs, beans, lentils, fish, or freshly prepared poultry.

3. Prepare More Meals at Home

Home cooking gives you greater control over ingredients and portion sizes.

Simple meals built around vegetables, legumes, whole grains, and appropriate protein sources can support cardiovascular health.

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4. Choose Whole Foods More Often

Fresh fruit, vegetables, nuts, seeds, and minimally processed foods provide valuable nutrients without requiring many added preservatives.

Frozen vegetables and plain frozen fruit can also be convenient, nutritious choices.

5. Rethink Your Everyday Snacks

Instead of relying exclusively on packaged snack foods, consider options such as fruit, unsalted nuts, plain yogurt, or homemade snacks.

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The goal is not perfection but improving your overall dietary pattern.

6. Pay Attention to Sodium

High sodium intake is an established dietary contributor to elevated blood pressure.

Even products without the eight additives identified in the study may contain substantial amounts of sodium.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(159); });
Comparing sodium content between similar products remains a practical cardiovascular health strategy.

7. Focus on Consistency, Not Fear

An occasional processed food does not determine your long-term health.

What matters most is your overall pattern of eating and other established cardiovascular risk factors.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(160); });
Reducing unnecessary additives can be a reasonable precaution, but there is currently no proof that avoiding these eight preservatives alone prevents hypertension.

What Are the Best Foods for Healthy Blood Pressure?

Research consistently supports dietary patterns rich in minimally processed, nutrient-dense foods.

The DASH diet, which stands for Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension, is particularly well studied.

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It emphasizes vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, nuts, and appropriate amounts of low-fat dairy or alternatives.

Foods naturally rich in potassium, magnesium, fiber, and other beneficial nutrients can contribute to healthy blood pressure regulation.

Examples include leafy greens, beans, lentils, bananas, oats, pumpkin seeds, and unsalted nuts.

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Olive oil and other sources of unsaturated fats can also support a heart-healthy eating pattern.

Importantly, people with kidney disease or those taking certain medications may need individualized guidance about potassium intake.

No single food or herb can replace appropriate treatment for high blood pressure.

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What Were the Study's Limitations?

Despite its large sample size, the research had several important limitations.

First, participants were volunteers, meaning the study population may not fully represent the broader public.

Second, dietary information was self-reported, which can introduce measurement errors.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(164); });
Third, hypertension may have gone undiagnosed in some participants.

Fourth, people who regularly consume certain preservatives may have other dietary and lifestyle characteristics that influence cardiovascular risk.

Finally, testing multiple additives and outcomes can produce associations that require confirmation in independent studies.

Researchers attempted to account for relevant confounding factors, but some uncertainty inevitably remains.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(165); });
Larger studies across different populations and additional experimental work will be needed before specific causal conclusions can be reached.

The Bigger Issue: What Are We Really Eating Every Day?

Food preservation has transformed modern life.

It has helped make food safer, more accessible, and easier to store.

Yet today's food supply also contains complex combinations of additives that people may consume repeatedly over many years.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(166); });
Understanding the long-term effects of those combinations is an important area of nutritional science.

The French research does not establish that these preservatives cause heart disease.

It does, however, suggest that their potential cardiovascular effects deserve further investigation.

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For consumers, the most practical message is not to panic over every ingredient name.

It is to become more aware of the foods they eat most frequently.

An occasional packaged snack is unlikely to define anyone's cardiovascular future.

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But regularly choosing more minimally processed foods, monitoring sodium intake, staying physically active, and managing blood pressure can contribute to better long-term health.

Final Thoughts

The discovery of associations between eight common food preservatives and hypertension raises important questions about modern food production.

The most notable finding was the higher relative risk observed among participants with the greatest consumption of certain preservative categories.

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Nevertheless, correlation is not causation, and the results need confirmation before individual additives can be blamed for cardiovascular disease.

The healthiest response is a balanced one: make informed food choices without unnecessary fear.

Read labels, prioritize whole foods when possible, and pay attention to the dietary habits that matter most for heart health.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(170); });
The next time you pick up a packaged food, look beyond the calories and sugar. The ingredient list may tell you more about what you are eating than you realize.

Medical Disclaimer: This article is for educational and informational purposes only and does not replace medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. The research discussed describes statistical associations and does not prove that food preservatives cause hypertension or cardiovascular disease. Consult a qualified healthcare professional for personalized dietary advice and blood pressure management. Do not stop prescribed medications without medical supervision.

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