

## DASH for Better Blood Pressure

Blood pressure can be unhealthy even if it stays only slightly above the normal level of less than 120/80 mmHg. The more your blood pressure rises above normal, the greater the health risk.

Scientists have conducted studies that showed an eating plan that is low in saturated fat, cholesterol, and total fat and that emphasizes fruits, vegetables, and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products lowers blood pressure.

This eating plan—known as the DASH eating plan—also includes whole grain products, fish, poultry, and nuts. It is lower in lean red meat, sweets, added sugars, and sugar-containing beverages than the typical American diet. It is rich in the minerals potassium, magnesium, and calcium, as well as protein and fiber.

DASH stands for Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension. The DASH eating plan used along with other lifestyle changes can help you prevent and control blood pressure. If your blood pressure is not too high, you may be able to control it entirely by changing your eating habits, losing weight if you are overweight, getting regular physical activity and cutting down on alcohol.

The DASH eating plan also has other benefits, such as lowering LDL (“bad”) cholesterol, which, along with lowering blood pressure, can reduce your risk for getting heart disease.

If you need to lose weight, even a small weight loss will help to lower your risks of developing high blood pressure and other serious health conditions. At the very least, you should not gain weight. A recent study showed that people can lose weight while following the DASH eating plan and lowering their sodium intake.

The DASH eating plan has more daily servings of fruits, vegetables, and whole grain foods than you may be used to eating. Because the plan is high in fiber, it can cause bloating and diarrhea in some persons. To avoid these problems, gradually increase your intake of fruit, vegetables, and whole grain foods.

Because it is rich in fruits and vegetables, which are naturally lower in sodium than many other foods, the DASH eating plan makes it easier to consume less salt and sodium.

The key to reducing salt intake is making wise food choices. Only a small amount of salt that we consume comes from the salt added at the table, and only small amounts of sodium occur naturally in food. Processed foods account for most of the salt and sodium we consume. So, be sure to read food labels to choose products lower in sodium. You may be surprised to find which foods have sodium. They include baked goods, certain cereals, soy sauce, seasoned salts, monosodium glutamate (MSG), baking soda, and some antacids.

The DASH eating plan also emphasizes potassium from food, especially fruits and vegetables, to help keep blood pressure levels healthy. A potassium-rich diet may help to reduce elevated or high blood pressure, but be sure to get your potassium from food sources, not from supplements. Many fruits and vegetables, some milk products, and fish are rich sources of potassium. Fruits and vegetables are rich in the form of potassium that your body uses best. This form of potassium may help to reduce risk of kidney stones and bone loss. While salt substitutes containing potassium are sometimes needed by persons on drug therapy for high blood

pressure, these supplements can be harmful to people with certain medical conditions. Ask your doctor before trying salt substitutes or supplements.

### Tips To Reduce Salt and Sodium

- Choose low- or reduced-sodium, or no-salt-added versions of foods and condiments when available. Look for those with less than 140 milligrams sodium per serving.
- Choose fresh, frozen, or canned (low-sodium or no-salt-added) vegetables.
- Use fresh poultry, fish, and lean meat, rather than canned, smoked, or processed types. Some poultry has sodium added so make sure you check the label.
- Choose ready-to-eat breakfast cereals that are lower in sodium.
- Limit cured foods (such as bacon and ham); foods packed in brine (such as pickles, pickled vegetables, olives, and sauerkraut); and condiments (such as mustard, horseradish, ketchup, and barbecue sauce). Limit even lower sodium versions of soy sauce and teriyaki sauce. Treat these condiments sparingly as you do table salt.
- Cook rice, pasta, and hot cereals without salt. Cut back on instant or flavored rice,

pasta, and cereal mixes, which usually have added salt.

- Choose “convenience” foods that are lower in sodium. Cut back on frozen dinners, mixed dishes such as pizza, packaged mixes, canned soups or broths, and salad dressings—these often have a lot of sodium.
- Rinse canned foods, such as tuna and canned beans, to remove some of the sodium.
- Use spices instead of salt. In cooking and at the table, flavor foods with herbs, spices, lemon, lime, vinegar, or salt-free seasoning blends.
- Start by cutting salt in half.

Start the DASH eating plan today—it can help you prevent and control high blood pressure, has other health benefits for your heart, can be used to lose weight, and meets your nutritional needs.

For more information go to:

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/dash/>

## DASH Eating Plan— Number of Daily Servings for Four Calorie Levels

Food Groups	Servings/Day			
	Calories per day			
	1600	2000	2600	3100
Grains *	6	6–8	10–11	12–13
Vegetables	3–4	4–5	5–6	6
Fruit	4	4–5	5–6	6
Fat free or low fat milk	2–3	2–3	3	3–4
Lean meats, poultry, fish	3–6	6 or less	6	6–9
Nuts, seeds, legumes	3/week	4–5 per week	1	1
Fats and oils	2	2–3	3	4
Sweets and added sugars	0	5 or less per week	≤2	≤2

\* Whole grains are recommended for most grain servings as a good source of fiber and nutrients.