

# Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (The DASH Diet)

## What is hypertension?

Hypertension is the term for blood pressure that is consistently higher than normal. Blood pressure is the force of blood against artery walls as the heart pumps blood through the body. Blood pressure can be unhealthy if it is above 120/80. The higher your blood pressure, the greater the health risk.

High blood pressure can be controlled if you take these steps:

- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Be physically active.
- Follow a healthy eating plan, which includes foods lower in salt and sodium.
- If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation.

As noted in this list, diet affects high blood pressure. Following the DASH diet and reducing the amount of sodium in your diet will help lower your blood pressure. It will also help prevent high blood pressure.

## What is the DASH diet?

Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) is a diet that is low in saturated fat, cholesterol, and total fat. It emphasizes fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy foods. The DASH diet also includes whole-grain products, fish, poultry, and nuts. It encourages fewer servings of red meat, sweets, and sugar-containing beverages. It is rich in magnesium, potassium, and calcium, as well as protein and fiber.

## How do I get started on the DASH diet?

The DASH diet requires no special foods and has no hard-to-follow recipes. Start by seeing how DASH compares with your current eating habits.

The DASH eating plan shown is based on 2,000 calories a day. Your health care provider or a dietitian can help you determine how many calories a day you need. Most adults need somewhere between 1600 and 2800 calories a day. Serving sizes will vary between 1/2 cup and 1 1/4 cups. Check the product's nutrition label to determine serving sizes of particular products.

Number of Food Group	Examples of servings	serving size
Grains and grain products	7 to 8	1 slice of bread, 1 cup ready-to-eat cold cereal 1/2 cup cooked rice, pasta, or cereal
Vegetables	4 to 5	1 cup raw leafy vegetable 1/2 cup cooked vegetable 6 oz vegetable juice
Fruits	4 to 5	1 medium fruit 1/4 cup dried fruit 1/2 cup fresh, frozen, or canned fruit 6 oz fruit juice
Low-fat or fat-free dairy foods	2 to 3	8 oz milk 1 cup yogurt 1 1/2 ounces cheese
Lean meats, poultry, or fish	2 or fewer	3 ounces cooked lean meat, skinless poultry, or fish
Nuts, seeds, and dry beans	4 to 5 per week	1/3 cup or 1 1/2 oz nuts 1 tablespoon or 1/2 oz seeds 1/2 cup cooked dry beans

Fats and oils	2 to 3	1 teaspoon soft margarine 1 tablespoon low-fat mayonnaise 2 tablespoons light salad dressing 1 teaspoon vegetable oil
Sweets	5 per week	1 tablespoon sugar 1 tablespoon jelly or jam 1/2 oz jelly beans 8 oz lemonade

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Make changes gradually. Here are some suggestions that might help:

- If you now eat 1 or 2 servings of vegetables a day, add a serving at lunch and another at dinner.
- If you don't eat fruit now or have only juice at breakfast, add a serving to your meals or have it as a snack.
- Drink milk or water with lunch or dinner instead of soda, sugar-sweetened tea, or alcohol. Choose low-fat (1%) or fat-free (skim) dairy products to reduce how much saturated fat, total fat, cholesterol, and calories you eat. If you have trouble digesting dairy products, try taking lactase enzyme pills or drops (available at drugstores and groceries) with the dairy foods. Or buy lactose-free milk or milk with lactase enzyme added to it.
- Read food labels on margarines and salad dressings to choose products lowest in fat.
- If you now eat large portions of meat, cut back gradually--by a half or a third at each meal. Limit meat to 6 ounces a day (2 servings). Three to four ounces is about the size of a deck of cards.
- Have 2 or more vegetarian-style (meatless) meals each week. Increase servings of vegetables, rice, pasta, and beans in all meals. Try casseroles and pasta, and stir-fry dishes, which have less meat and more vegetables, grains, and beans.
- Use fruits canned in their own juice. Fresh fruits require little or no preparation. Dried fruits are a good choice to carry with you or to have ready in the car.
- Try these snacks ideas: unsalted pretzels or nuts mixed with raisins, graham crackers, low-fat and fat-free yogurt and frozen yogurt, popcorn with no salt or butter added, and raw vegetables.
- Choose whole grain foods to get more nutrients, including minerals and fiber. For example, choose whole-wheat bread or whole-grain cereals.
- Use fresh, frozen, or no-salt-added canned vegetables.

Remember to also reduce the salt and sodium in your diet. Try to have no more than 2000 milligrams (mg) of sodium per day, with a goal of further reducing the sodium to 1500 mg per day. Three important ways to reduce sodium are:

- Use reduced-sodium or no-salt-added food products.
- Use less salt when you prepare foods and do not add salt to your food at the table.
- Read food labels. Aim for foods that are less than 5 percent of the daily value of sodium.

The DASH eating plan was not designed for weight loss. But it contains many lower calorie foods, such as fruits and vegetables. You can make it lower in calories by replacing higher calorie foods with more fruits and vegetables. Some ideas to increase fruits and vegetables and decrease calories include:

- Eat a medium apple instead of four shortbread cookies. You'll save 80 calories.
- Eat 1/4 cup of dried apricots instead of a 2-ounce bag of pork rinds. You'll save 230 calories.
- Have a hamburger that's 3 ounces instead of 6 ounces. Add a 1/2 cup serving of carrots and a 1/2 cup serving of spinach. You'll save more than 200 calories.
- Instead of 5 ounces of chicken, have a stir fry with 2 ounces of chicken and 1 and 1/2 cups of raw vegetables. Use a small amount of vegetable oil. You'll save 50 calories.
- Have a 1/2 cup serving of low-fat frozen yogurt instead of a 1 and 1/2 ounce milk chocolate bar. You'll save about 110 calories.
- Use low-fat or fat-free condiments, such as fat free salad dressings.
- Eat smaller portions--cut back gradually.
- Use food labels to compare fat content in packaged foods. Items marked low-fat or fat-free may be lower in fat without being lower in calories than their regular versions.
- Limit foods with lots of added sugar, such as pies, flavored yogurts, candy bars, ice cream, sherbet, regular soft drinks, and fruit drinks.
- Drink water or club soda instead of cola or other soda drinks.

For more information, see the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute Web site at:

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/hbp/dash/>.

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