

AT - A - GLANCE :



Lowering Your Blood Pressure With DASH

What you eat affects your chances of developing high blood pressure (hypertension). Research shows that high blood pressure can be prevented—and lowered—by following the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) eating plan, which focuses on fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and other foods that are heart healthy and low in salt and sodium.

High blood pressure, which is blood pressure higher than 140/90 mmHg,¹ affects more than 65 million—or 1 out of every 3—American adults. Another 59 million Americans have prehypertension, which is blood pressure between 120/80 and 140/89 mmHg. This increases their chances of developing high blood pressure and its complications.

High blood pressure is dangerous because it makes your heart work too hard, hardens the walls of your arteries, and can cause the brain to hemorrhage or the kidneys to function poorly or not at all. If not controlled, high blood pressure can lead to heart and kidney disease, stroke, and blindness.

But high blood pressure can be prevented—and lowered—if you take these steps:

- Follow a healthy eating plan, such as DASH, that includes foods lower in salt and sodium.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Be moderately physically active for at least 30 minutes on most days of the week.
- If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation.

If you already have high blood pressure and your doctor has prescribed medicine, take your medicine as directed.

The DASH Eating Plan

The DASH eating plan is rich in fruits, vegetables, fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products, whole grains, fish, poultry, beans, seeds, and nuts. Compared with the typical American diet, it contains less salt and sodium; sweets, added sugars, and sugar-containing beverages; fats; and red meats. This heart healthy way of eating is also lower in saturated fat, *trans* fat, and cholesterol and rich in nutrients that are associated with lowering blood pressure—mainly potassium, magnesium, calcium, protein, and fiber.

The DASH eating plan requires no special foods and has no hard-to-follow recipes. It simply calls for a certain number of daily servings from various food groups.

The number of servings depends on the number of calories you're allowed each day. Your calorie level depends on your age and, especially, how active you are. Think of this as an energy balance system—if you want to maintain your current weight, you should take in only as many calories as you burn by being physically active. If you need to lose weight, eat fewer calories than you burn or increase your activity level to burn more calories than you eat.



¹ Blood pressure is usually measured in millimeters of mercury, or mmHg.

DASH Tips for Gradual Change

Make these changes over a couple of days or weeks to give yourself a chance to adjust and make them part of your daily routine:

- Add a serving of vegetables at lunch one day and dinner the next, and add fruit at one meal or as a snack.
- Increase your use of fat-free and low-fat milk products to three servings a day.
- Limit lean meats to 6 ounces a day—3 ounces each portion, which is about the size of a deck of cards. If you usually eat large portions of meats, cut them back over a couple of days—by half or a third at each meal.
- Include two or more vegetarian-style, or meatless, meals each week.
- Increase servings of vegetables, brown rice, whole-wheat pasta, and cooked dry beans.
- For snacks and desserts, use fruits or other foods low in saturated fat, *trans* fat, cholesterol, sodium, sugar, and calories—for example, unsalted rice cakes; unsalted nuts or

seeds; raisins; graham crackers; fat-free, low-fat, or frozen yogurt; popcorn with no salt or butter added; or raw vegetables.

- Use fresh, frozen, or low-sodium canned vegetables and fruits.

Making other lifestyle changes, such as losing weight if needed and being physically active, while following the DASH eating plan is the best way to prevent and control high blood pressure.

Learn More

More information on high blood pressure and the DASH eating plan is available from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) Web site at www.nhlbi.nih.gov (under Health Information for the Public). Podcasts and Spanish-language articles also can be found in the online Diseases and Conditions Index at www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/.

You also can order or download information on lowering blood pressure from the NHLBI Web site or by calling the NHLBI Health Information Center at 301-592-8573 (TTY: 240-629-3255).

Want More Information?

These NHLBI publications will help you set and reach healthy eating goals!



Your Guide to Lowering Your Blood Pressure With DASH (#06-4082)

This easy-to-read booklet includes tips on following the DASH eating plan, a week's worth of sample menus and recipes, and information about weight loss and physical activity.

In Brief: Your Guide to Lowering Your Blood Pressure With DASH (#06-5834)

Critical messages from "Your Guide to Lowering Your Blood Pressure With DASH" are provided in this easy-to-read fact sheet.



Also of interest:

• My Blood Pressure Wallet Card (#03-5068)

This handy card helps patients monitor their blood pressure readings, remember medications, and make lifestyle changes to help lower their blood pressure.

• Your Guide to Lowering Blood Pressure (#03-5232)

A patient handbook that provides guidance on lowering your blood pressure by maintaining a healthy weight, being physically active, and eating right.



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To Order: Visit www.nhlbi.nih.gov or <http://email.nhlbihin.net> or call 301-592-8573