

Healthy Eating: The DASH Diet



The DASH diet is an eating plan that can help lower your blood pressure. With this plan, you will focus on eating fruits, vegetables, healthy fats, and low-fat or nonfat dairy foods. DASH stands for Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension. Hypertension is high blood pressure.

How does the DASH diet lower blood pressure?

The fruits, vegetables, and dairy foods in the DASH diet are rich in calcium, potassium, and magnesium. Getting plenty of these minerals and less unhealthy fats and processed foods can help lower blood pressure.

Many Americans eat too many processed foods. Processing helps foods have a longer shelf life so that they can be sold in stores. Many of our

most familiar foods are processed. Some examples include chips, snack crackers, cheese spreads, fast foods, canned soups, and other canned goods.

People who eat too many processed foods usually get too much sodium and not enough potassium, calcium, and magnesium. This can lead to high blood pressure. These nutrients come from fruits, vegetables, and dairy products.

Eating 8 to 10 servings of fruits and vegetables and 2 to 3 servings of low-fat or nonfat dairy products every day may lower your blood pressure. Simply adding calcium, potassium, and magnesium supplements to your diet will not lower your blood pressure.

The DASH diet

Talk to your doctor before you begin this diet. Some people have health problems that cause them to have too much potassium in their blood. People who have these problems need a diet that is lower in potassium than the DASH diet.

If you are taking blood pressure medicines, talk to your doctor before eating grapefruit or drinking grapefruit juice. Grapefruit may interfere with certain medicines.

Follow these guidelines to lower your blood pressure:

Low-fat or nonfat milk and milk products	2 to 3 servings a day. (A serving is 8 ounces milk, 1 cup yogurt, or 1½ ounces cheese.)
Fruits	4 to 5 servings a day. (A serving is 1 medium-sized piece of fruit, ½ cup chopped or canned fruit, 4 ounces [½ cup] fruit juice, or ¼ cup dried fruit.) Choose fruit more often than fruit juice.
Vegetables	4 to 5 servings a day. (A serving is 1 cup lettuce or raw leafy vegetables, ½ cup chopped or cooked vegetables, or 4 ounces [½ cup] vegetable juice.) Choose vegetables more often than vegetable juice.
Whole grains	6 to 8 servings a day. (A serving is 1 slice of bread, 1 ounce dry cereal, or ½ cup cooked rice, pasta, or cooked cereal.) Choose whole-grain products as much as possible.
Lean meat, poultry, fish	2 or fewer servings a day. (A serving is 3 ounces, about the size of a deck of cards.)
Legumes, nuts, seeds	4 to 5 servings a week. (A serving is 1/3 cup nuts, 2 tablespoons seeds, or ½ cup cooked dry beans or peas.)
Fats and oils	2 to 3 servings a day. (A serving is 1 teaspoon soft margarine or vegetable oil, 1 tablespoon mayonnaise, or 2 tablespoons salad dressing.)
Sweets and added sugar	5 servings a week or less. (A serving is 1 tablespoon sugar or jam, ½ ounce jelly beans [about 20], or 1 cup lemonade.)

If you need help changing your diet, talk to your doctor. He or she may refer you to a registered dietitian.