

High Blood Pressure: Adding DASH to Your Life



The DASH diet is an eating plan that is low in fat but rich in low-fat or nonfat dairy foods, healthy fats, fruits, and vegetables. It can lower blood pressure. DASH stands for Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension. Hypertension is high blood pressure.

How can you add DASH to your lifestyle?

Make small changes first by changing only your fruit and vegetable intake. Keep track of the fruits and vegetables you eat, and slowly add more to your diet. Your goal is 8 to 10 servings a day. A serving of most vegetables and fruits is only $\frac{1}{2}$ cup, about the size of an ice cream scoop.

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 need help changing your diet, talk to your doctor. He or she may refer you to a registered dietitian, an expert in healthy eating.

Try these suggestions for eating more fruits and vegetables:

- Try to eat fruits and/or vegetables at every meal. Take fruit to work or school as a snack.
- Make a baked potato bar. Serve baked potatoes with a variety of vegetables, such as broccoli, and use other toppings, such as chili, ratatouille, salsa, and beans. If you use toppings from a can or jar, be sure to choose low-sodium varieties, or even better, make them yourself from fresh ingredients. Be creative. You could end up with 4 to 5 servings of vegetables at one meal.
- Make a dip for fruit from low-fat vanilla yogurt and cinnamon.
- For a snack, have a smoothie made with low-fat milk and frozen fruit chunks.
- Combine a ready-made pizza crust with low-fat mozzarella cheese and lots of vegetable toppings. Use tomatoes, squash, spinach, broccoli, carrots, cauliflower, and onions.
- Use a variety of cut-up vegetables with a low-fat dip as an appetizer, instead of high-fat chips and dips. Try some new vegetables. Make a stir-fry containing lots of different vegetables.
- Try some vegetarian meals using beans and peas. Add garbanzo beans to a salad. Use fat-free refried beans. Make split pea or black bean soup. Buy a vegetarian cookbook, and try one recipe each month or each week.

Once you are eating the right amount of fruits and vegetables each week, move on to other changes.

- Eat less saturated fat. This is found in meats, dairy products, and processed foods. Use vegetable oils such as canola, olive, and corn oils. And eat healthy fats from nuts and fish.

- Eat less sodium by cutting down on how much processed food you eat, such as snack items, lunch meats, and canned soups. Buy frozen meals that have less than 400 milligrams of sodium listed on the label.
- Drink nonfat milk. A glass of skim milk has only 80 calories and no fat and is packed with blood pressure-lowering nutrients. Get 2 to 3 servings of milk or milk products every day.
- For breakfast, have whole-grain cereal, fruit, and skim milk.