

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?

People who eat a lot of processed foods might get too much sodium and not enough potassium, calcium, and magnesium. This can lead to high blood pressure.

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

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.

It's also best to limit saturated fat and sodium. These are often found in processed foods. Processed foods include chips, snack crackers, fast foods, and canned goods. Try to limit how much sodium you eat to less than 2,300 milligrams (mg) a day. This can help lower your blood pressure. If you limit your sodium to 1,500 mg a day, you can lower your blood pressure even more.



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.

For specific DASH diet guidelines, see the table that follows.

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 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 jelly or jam, ½ cup sorbet, 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.