



DASH diet: Healthy eating to lower your blood pressure

DASH stands for Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension. This diet is a lifelong approach to healthy eating that's designed to help treat or prevent high blood pressure (hypertension). It emphasizes:

- Portion control
- Eating a variety of foods
- Getting the right amount of nutrients that help lower blood pressure, such as potassium, calcium and magnesium
- Reducing the sodium in your diet

With the DASH diet, you can reduce your blood pressure by a few points in just two weeks. It's also in line with dietary recommendations to prevent osteoporosis, cancer, heart disease, stroke and diabetes, too. And while it is not a weight-loss program, you may indeed lose unwanted pounds by following this healthier diet.

DASH diet: sodium levels

The DASH diet includes two approaches for controlling salt intake:

- *The standard DASH diet* meets the recommendation from the Dietary Guidelines for Americans to keep daily sodium intake to less than 2,300 mg a day, **which is equal to one teaspoon of salt.**
- *The lower sodium DASH diet* matches the recommendation to reduce sodium to 1,500 mg a day if you're 51 and older, black, or have high blood pressure, diabetes or chronic kidney disease.

DASH diet: what to eat

Both versions of the DASH diet include lots of whole grains, fruits, vegetables and low-fat dairy products. They also include some fish, poultry and legumes, which include beans, peas, lentils, soybeans and peanuts. You can eat red meat, sweets and fats in small amounts. The diet is low in saturated fat, cholesterol and total fat.

Here's a look at the recommended servings from each food group for the 2,000-calorie-a-day DASH diet. To be certain you're eating the right serving amount, always read the nutrition labels on food packages.

GRAINS: 6 to 8 servings a day

Grains include bread, cereal, rice and pasta. Focus on 100% whole grains because they have more fiber and nutrients than refined grains. **Serving size** is equal to **1/2 cup** cooked pasta or cereal. **1 ounce** uncooked pasta, brown rice or other grain. **1 slice** of bread.

VEGETABLES: 4 to 5 servings a day

Tomatoes, carrots, broccoli, sweet potatoes, greens and other vegetables are full of fiber, vitamins and minerals such as potassium and magnesium. When buying frozen and canned vegetables, choose those labeled as low sodium or without added salt. **Serving size** is equal to **1 cup** of raw or cooked vegetables or vegetable juice, or **2 cups** of raw leafy greens.

FRUITS: 4 to 5 servings a day

Many fruits need little preparation to become a healthy part of a meal or snack. Like vegetables, they're packed with fiber, potassium and magnesium and are typically low in fat — exceptions include avocados and coconuts. **Serving size** is equal to **1 medium fruit** (baseball size), **1/2 cup** chopped, cooked or canned fruit, or **1/2 cup** juice.

DAIRY: 2 to 3 servings a day

Milk, yogurt, cheese and other dairy products are major sources of calcium, vitamin D and protein. The key is to make sure that you choose dairy products that are low fat or fat-free. **Serving size** is equal to **1 cup** of milk, **1 cup** of yogurt, or **1 to 1.5 ounces** of cheese.

LEAN MEAT, POULTRY AND FISH: 6 or fewer servings a day

Meat can be a rich source of protein, B vitamins, iron and zinc. But because even lean varieties contain fat and cholesterol, serving sizes should be kept small. **Serving size** is equal to **3 ounces**.

FATS AND OILS: 2 to 3 servings a day

Fat helps your body absorb essential vitamins and helps your body's immune system. But too much fat increases your risk of heart disease, diabetes and obesity. **Serving size** is equal to **1 teaspoon** soft margarine, **1 tablespoon** low-fat mayonnaise, **2 tablespoons** light salad dressing, or **1 teaspoon** of oil.

NUTS, SEEDS AND BEANS: 4 to 5 servings a week

Almonds, sunflower seeds, kidney beans, peas, lentils and other foods in this family are good sources of fiber, magnesium, potassium and protein. Serving sizes are small because these foods are high in calories. **Serving size** is equal to **1/4 cup** cooked beans, lentils, or peas. **1/4 cup** nuts, **2 tablespoons** seeds, or **2 tablespoons** of peanut butter.

SWEETS: 5 or fewer a week

You don't have to banish sweets entirely while following the DASH diet — just go easy on them. **Serving size** is equal to **1 tablespoon** sugar, jelly or jam.

DASH diet: alcohol and caffeine

Drinking too much alcohol can increase blood pressure. The DASH diet recommends that men limit alcohol to two or fewer drinks a day and women one or less. The diet doesn't address caffeine consumption. The influence of caffeine on blood pressure remains unclear. But caffeine can cause your blood pressure to rise at least temporarily. If you already have high blood pressure, or if you think caffeine is affecting your blood pressure, talk to your doctor about your caffeine consumption.

Source: Adapted from: The Mayo Clinic Website: DASH Diet: Healthy Eating to Lower Your Blood Pressure, mayoclinic.org. (accessed October 2015).

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