Healthy Eating: Lowering Your Blood Pressure with DASH

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About one-third of American adults have high blood pressure (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013). Uncontrolled high blood pressure can cause heart disease, kidney disease, stroke, and blindness. Being physically active, taking medications as directed, and eating a healthy diet all help to control blood pressure (American Heart Association, 2012). One eating plan that has been shown to prevent and reduce high blood pressure is DASH. Read on to learn how the DASH eating plan can help you lower your blood pressure.

What Is the DASH Eating Plan and Why Is It Important?

DASH stands for Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension. The DASH eating plan is rich in fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy products, making it high in calcium, magnesium, and potassium—these three minerals can help lower blood pressure. It is low in saturated fat and cholesterol, and moderate in total fat. The eating plan is more effective when you also reduce your sodium intake (Sacks et al., 2001).

Several studies have shown that the DASH diet lowers blood pressure in people with high blood pressure. It also helps maintain normal blood pressure. Eating the DASH way can help you lose weight if you are overweight. Losing excess body weight can help lower your blood pressure (Sacks et al., 2001).

How Much and What Types of Foods Should I Eat?

The DASH eating plan includes lots of fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy products, and whole grains. You also eat poultry, lean meats, fish, legumes, eggs, and nuts (National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, 2012).

For a 1,600-calorie meal plan, the DASH diet includes the following amounts of food from each food group (Table 1):

Figure 1. Credits: Brand X Pictures
Food group recommendations in the DASH eating plan also are available for 2,000, 2,600, and 3,100 calorie diets and can be found at http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/dash/followdash.html.

In general, older adults need fewer calories than younger adults. If you need more than 1,600 calories each day, you can add more servings.

**What Is a Serving?**

Here are some examples of one serving from each of the food groups:

**Grains**

1 slice of bread

1/2 cup dry cereal

1/2 cup cooked rice or pasta

**Vegetables**

1 cup raw, leafy vegetables

1/2 cup cooked or cut-up raw vegetables

1/2 cup vegetable juice

**Fruits**

1 medium fruit

1/4 cup dried fruit

1/2 cup frozen, canned, or cut-up fresh fruit

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**Table 1.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food Group</th>
<th>Servings/day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grains (most of your servings should be whole grain)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetables</td>
<td>3–4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruits</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-fat dairy</td>
<td>2–3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lean meats, poultry, and fish</td>
<td>3–4 or less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuts, seeds, or legumes</td>
<td>3–4 per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fats and oils</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweets</td>
<td>3 or less per week</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, 2012.
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Low-Fat Dairy*
1 cup milk or yogurt
1.5 oz cheese
*Use fat-free for fewer calories and fat

Lean Meats, Poultry, and Fish
1 oz cooked meat, poultry, or fish
1 egg or 2 egg whites

Nuts, Seeds, and Legumes
1/3 cup or 1.5 oz nuts
2 Tbsp peanut butter
2 Tbsp or 1/2 ounce seeds
1/2 cup cooked dry beans or peas

Fats and Oils
1 tsp margarine or vegetable oil
1 Tbsp mayonnaise
2 Tbsp salad dressing

Sweets
1 Tbsp sugar, jelly, or jam
1 cup lemonade

If switching to the DASH diet sounds overwhelming, don’t despair! Gradually add in the recommended foods such as fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy, and lean meats. Remember, doing something is better than doing nothing!

For more information about high blood pressure, see Healthy Living: High Blood Pressure (FCS8599) on the EDIS website at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fy684.

For information on how to make better dietary choices using the food label, read Healthy Eating: Understanding the Nutrition Facts Label (FCS8883) at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fy1127.

References


Source: National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, 2013.