



Your Guide To Lowering Your Blood Pressure With DASH

What you eat affects your chances of developing high blood pressure (hypertension). Research shows that high blood pressure can be prevented—and lowered—by following the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) eating plan, which includes eating less salt and sodium.

High blood pressure, which is blood pressure higher than 140/90 mmHg,^{*} affects more than 65 million—or 1 out of every 3—American adults. Another 59 million Americans have prehypertension, which is blood pressure between 120/80 and 140/89 mmHg. This increases their chances of developing high blood pressure and its complications.

High blood pressure is dangerous because it makes your heart work too hard, hardens the walls of your arteries, and can cause the brain to hemorrhage or the kidneys to function poorly or not at all. If not controlled, high blood pressure can lead to heart and kidney disease, stroke, and blindness.

But high blood pressure can be prevented—and lowered—if you take these steps:

- Follow a healthy eating plan, such as DASH, that includes foods lower in salt and sodium.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Be moderately physically active for at least 30 minutes on most days of the week.
- If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation.

If you already have high blood pressure and your doctor has prescribed medicine, take your medicine, as directed, and also follow these steps.

The DASH Eating Plan

The DASH eating plan is rich in fruits, vegetables, fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products, whole grains, fish, poultry, beans, seeds, and nuts. It also contains less salt and sodium; sweets, added sugars, and sugar-containing beverages; fats; and red meats than the typical American diet. This heart healthy way of eating is also lower in saturated fat, *trans* fat, and cholesterol and rich in nutrients that are associated with lowering blood pressure—mainly potassium, magnesium, and calcium, protein, and fiber.

How Do I Make the DASH?

The DASH eating plan requires no special foods and has no hard-to-follow recipes. It simply calls for a certain number of daily servings from various food groups.

The number of servings depends on the number of calories you're allowed each day. Your calorie level depends on your age and, especially, how active you are. Think of this as an energy balance system—if you want to maintain your current weight, you should take in only as many calories as you burn by being physically active. If you need to lose weight, eat fewer calories than you burn or increase your activity level to burn more calories than you eat.

What is your physical activity level? Are you mostly:

- Sedentary? You do only light physical activity that is part of your typical day-to-day routine.
- Moderately active? You do physical activity equal to walking about 1.5–3 miles a day plus light physical activity.
- Active? You do physical activity equal to walking more than 3 miles per day plus light physical activity.

Use the chart below to estimate your daily calorie needs.

Your Daily Calorie Needs

Gender	Calories Needed for Each Activity Level			
	Age (years)	Sedentary	Moderately Active	Active
Female	19–30	2,000	2,000–2,200	2,400
	31–50	1,800	2,000	2,200
	51+	1,600	1,800	2,000–2,200
Male	19–30	2,400	2,600–2,800	3,000
	31–50	2,200	2,400–2,600	2,800–3,000
	51+	2,000	2,200–2,400	2,400–2,800

Now that you know how many calories you're allowed each day, find the closest calorie level to yours in the chart called ["Following the DASH Eating Plan."](#) This shows roughly the number of servings from each food group that you can eat each day.

Next, compare DASH with your current eating pattern. Fill in the ["What's on Your Plate and How Much Are You Moving?"](#) chart for 1–2 days to compare what you usually eat with the DASH plan—and note how active you are. This should help you decide what changes you need to make in your food choices—and in the sizes of the portions you eat.

["A Day With the DASH Eating Plan"](#) shows a sample menu based on about 2,000 calories a day. Increase or decrease the serving sizes for your own calorie level. This chart also shows the two levels of sodium, 2,300 and 1,500 milligrams, that DASH allows each day. Because fruits and vegetables are naturally lower in sodium than many other foods, DASH makes it easier to eat less sodium. Try it at the 2,300-milligram level (about 1 teaspoon of table salt). Then, talk to your doctor about gradually lowering it to 1,500 milligrams a day. Keep in mind: The less salt you eat, the more you may be able to lower your blood pressure.

Choose and prepare foods with less salt, and don't bring the salt shaker to the table. Be creative—try herbs, spices, lemon, lime, vinegar, wine, and salt-free seasoning blends in cooking and at the table. And, because most of the salt, or sodium, that we eat comes from processed foods, be sure to read food labels to check the amount of sodium in different food products. Aim for foods that contain 5 percent or less of the Daily Value of sodium. Foods with 20 percent or more Daily Value of sodium are considered high. These include baked goods, certain cereals, soy sauce, some antacids—the range is wide.

DASH Tips for Gradual Change

Make these changes over days or weeks to give yourself a chance to adjust and make them part of your daily routine:

- Add a serving of vegetables at lunch one day and dinner the next, and add fruit at one meal or as a snack.
- Increase your use of fat-free and low-fat milk products to three servings a day.
- Limit lean meats to 6 ounces a day—3 ounces a meal, which is about the size of a deck of cards. If you usually eat large portions of meats, cut them back over a couple of days—by half or a third at each meal.
- Include two or more vegetarian-style, or meatless, meals each week.

Following the DASH Eating Use this chart to help you plan your menus—or take it with you when you go to the store.

Food Group	Servings Per Day			Serving Sizes	Examples and Notes	Significance of Each Food Group to the DASH Eating Plan
	1,600 Calories	2,000 Calories	2,600 Calories			
Grains*	6	6–8	10–11	1 slice bread 1 oz dry cereal† ½ cup cooked rice, pasta, or cereal	Whole wheat bread and rolls, whole wheat pasta, English muffin, pita bread, bagel, cereals, grits, oatmeal, brown rice, unsalted pretzels and popcorn	Major sources of energy and fiber
Vegetables	3–4	4–5	5–6	1 cup raw leafy vegetable ½ cup cut-up raw or cooked vegetable ½ cup vegetable juice	Broccoli, carrots, collards, green beans, green peas, kale, lima beans, potatoes, spinach, squash, sweet potatoes, tomatoes	Rich sources of potassium, magnesium, and fiber
Fruits	4	4–5	5–6	1 medium fruit ¼ cup dried fruit ½ cup fresh, frozen, or canned fruit ½ cup fruit juice	Apples, apricots, bananas, dates, grapes, oranges, grapefruit, grapefruit juice, mangoes, melons, peaches, pineapples, raisins, strawberries, tangerines	Important sources of potassium, magnesium, and fiber
Fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products	2–3	2–3	3	1 cup milk or yogurt 1½ oz cheese	Fat-free (skim) or low-fat (1%) milk or buttermilk; fat-free, low-fat, or reduced-fat cheese; fat-free or low-fat regular or frozen yogurt	Major sources of calcium and protein
Lean meats, poultry, and fish	3–6	6 or less	6	1 oz cooked meats, poultry, or fish 1 egg‡	Select only lean; trim away visible fats; broil, roast, or poach; remove skin from poultry	Rich sources of protein and magnesium
Nuts, seeds, and legumes	3 per week	4–5 per week	1	1/3 cup or 1½ oz nuts 2 Tbsp peanut butter 2 Tbsp or ½ oz seeds ½ cup cooked legumes (dry beans and peas)	Almonds, hazelnuts, mixed nuts, peanuts, walnuts, sunflower seeds, peanut butter, kidney beans, lentils, split peas	Rich sources of energy, magnesium, protein, and fiber
Fats and oils§	2	2–3	3	1 tsp soft margarine 1 tsp vegetable oil 1 Tbsp mayonnaise 2 Tbsp salad dressing	Soft margarine, vegetable oil (such as canola, corn, olive, or safflower), low-fat mayonnaise, light salad dressing	The DASH study had 27 percent of calories as fat, including fat in or added to foods
Sweets and added sugars	0	5 or less per week	2	1 Tbsp sugar 1 Tbsp jelly or jam ½ cup sorbet, gelatin 1 cup lemonade	Fruit-flavored gelatin, fruit punch, hard candy, jelly, maple syrup, sorbet and ices, sugar	Sweets should be low in fat

* Whole grains are recommended for most grain servings as a good source of fiber and nutrients.

† Serving sizes vary between ½ cup and 1¼ cups, depending on cereal type. Check the product's Nutrition Facts label.

‡ Since eggs are high in cholesterol, limit egg yolk intake to no more than four per week; two egg whites have the same protein content as 1 oz of meat.

§ Fat content changes serving amount for fats and oils. For example, 1 Tbsp of regular salad dressing equals one serving; 1 Tbsp of a low-fat dressing equals one-half serving; 1 Tbsp of a fat-free dressing equals zero servings.

Abbreviations: oz = ounce; Tbsp = tablespoon; tsp = teaspoon.

What's on Your Plate and How Much Are You Moving?

Use this form to track your food and physical activity habits before you start on the DASH eating plan or to see how you're doing after a few weeks. To record more than 1 day, just copy the form. Total each day's food groups and compare what you ate with the DASH eating plan at your calorie level.

- Increase servings of vegetables, brown rice, whole wheat pasta, and cooked dry beans. Try casseroles and stir-fry dishes, which have less meat and more vegetables, grains, and dry beans.
- For snacks and desserts, use fruits or other foods low in saturated fat, *trans* fat, cholesterol, sodium, sugar, and calories—for example, unsalted rice cakes; unsalted nuts or seeds, raisins; graham crackers; fat-free, low-fat, or frozen yogurt; popcorn with no salt or butter added; or raw vegetables.
- Use fresh, frozen, or low-sodium canned vegetables and fruits.

DASH Hints

- Be aware that DASH has more servings of fruits, vegetables, and whole grain foods than you may be used to eating. These foods are high in fiber and may cause some bloating and diarrhea. To avoid these problems, gradually increase the amount of fruit, vegetables, and whole grain foods that you eat over several weeks.
- If you have trouble digesting milk products, try taking lactase-enzyme pills (available at drug stores and groceries) with milk products. Or buy lactose-free milk, which includes the lactase enzyme.
- If you don't like or are allergic to nuts, use seeds or legumes (cooked dried beans or peas).
- If you take medicines to control your high blood pressure, keep taking them. But tell your doctor that you are now eating the DASH way.

Other Lifestyle Changes

Making other lifestyle changes while following the DASH eating plan is the best way to prevent and control high blood pressure.

Lose Weight, If Necessary, While Following DASH

DASH is rich in lower calorie foods, such as fruits and vegetables, so it can easily be changed to support weight loss. You can reduce calories even more by replacing higher calorie foods, such as sweets, with more fruits and vegetables. The best way to take off pounds is to do it slowly, over time, by getting more physical activity and eating fewer calories. To develop a weight-loss or weight-maintenance program that's tailored for you, talk to your doctor or registered dietitian.

Be Physically Active While Following the DASH Eating Plan

Combining DASH with a regular physical activity program, such as walking or swimming, will help you shed pounds and stay trim for the long term. Start with a simple 15-minute walk during your favorite time of day and gradually increase the amount of time you are active. You can do an activity for 30 minutes at one time, or choose shorter periods of at least 10 minutes each. The important thing is to total about 30 minutes of moderate activity on most days. To avoid weight gain or sustain weight loss, try for 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous activity each day.

Make the DASH for Life

DASH can help you prevent and control high blood pressure. It can also help you lose weight, if you need to. It meets your nutritional needs and has other health benefits for your heart. So get started today and make the DASH for a healthy life.

Date:			Number of Servings by DASH Food Group							
Food	Amount (serving size)	Sodium (mg)	Grains	Vegetables	Fruits	Milk products	Meats, fish, and poultry	Nuts, seeds, and legumes	Fats and oils	Sweets and added sugars
Example: whole wheat bread, with margarine	2 slices 2 tsp	299 52	2						2	
Breakfast										
Lunch										
Dinner										
Snacks										
Day's Totals										
2,000 calorie level example: Compare yours with the DASH eating plan at your calorie level.		2,300 or 1,500 mg per day	6–8 per day	4–5 per day	4–5 per day	2–3 per day	6 or less per day	4–5 per week	2–3 per day	5 or less per week
Enter your calorie level and servings per day:										
Physical Activity Log Aim for at least 30 min of moderate-intensity physical activity on most days of the week. When your heart is beating noticeably faster, the activity is probably moderately intense.	30 min 5 min			Moderate walking Cleaning						
Min per day per activity	Time:			Type of activity:						

A Day With the DASH Eating Plan

2,300 mg Sodium (Na) Menu	Substitution To Reduce Sodium to 1,500 mg
Breakfast ½ cup instant oatmeal 1 mini whole wheat bagel: 1 Tbsp peanut butter 1 medium banana 1 cup low-fat milk	½ cup regular oatmeal with 1 tsp cinnamon
Lunch chicken breast sandwich: 2 slices (3 oz) chicken breast, skinless 2 slices whole wheat bread 1 slice (¾ oz) natural cheddar cheese, reduced-fat 1 large leaf romaine lettuce 2 slices tomato 1 Tbsp mayonnaise, low-fat 1 cup cantaloupe chunks 1 cup apple juice	1 slice (¾ oz) natural Swiss cheese, low-sodium
Dinner 1 cup cooked spaghetti: ¾ cup low-salt vegetarian spaghetti sauce 3 Tbsp Parmesan cheese Spinach salad: 1 cup fresh spinach leaves ¼ cup fresh carrots, grated ¼ cup fresh mushrooms, sliced 1 Tbsp vinegar and oil dressing ½ cup corn, cooked from frozen ½ cup canned pears, juice pack	
Snacks ⅓ cup almonds, unsalted ¼ cup dried apricots 1 cup fruit yogurt, fat-free, no sugar added	

Nutrients Per Day	2,300 mg	1,500 mg
Calories	2,027	2,078
Total fat	64 g	68 g
Calories from fat	28%	30%
Saturated fat	13 g	16 g
Calories from saturated fat	6%	7%
Cholesterol	114 mg	129 mg
Sodium	2,035 mg	1,560 mg
Calcium	1,370 mg	1,334 mg
Magnesium	535 mg	542 mg
Potassium	4,715 mg	4,721 mg
Fiber	34 g	34 g