

KEYS TO BETTER HEALTH™

Blood Pressure and the DASH Diet

High blood pressure, or hypertension, is a major health issue affecting our country today. In 2013, nearly 1000 deaths per day were related to hypertension. Today, roughly 1 in 3 Americans suffers from high blood pressure, and only about half of those are able to control it¹.

Along with exercise and medication, diet can play an important role in the treatment and prevention of hypertension. One such diet, the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) Diet, has a proven record of reducing blood pressure². The Dash Diet is an eating plan that focuses on increasing fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, legumes, fish, and poultry in the diet while decreasing sodium, red meat, fats and added sugars³. Below is a brief overview on a few ways to incorporate the DASH diet into your lifestyle.

1. To start, make small changes

Success is most likely to be met with small, gradual changes to your diet over a long period of time. Starting with a few small goals, such as using half as much margarine or butter as you currently do or slowly reducing the amount of salt you add to your meals, can help you get momentum to transition to larger goals. Small changes create a big impact over time.



2. Focus on fruits and vegetables

Embrace different seasonings and cooking methods to highlight vegetables as the star of the meal. Easily increase flavor by roasting, sautéing, grilling or your vegetables, and don't forget to add plenty of salt-free seasoning - many of the same herbs and spices you would add to meat pair wonderfully with vegetables. Opt for meals where meat is a smaller component of a dish with a higher amount of vegetables and whole grains, such as in stir fry or casseroles, or try meatless meals a couple of times a week. Finally, finish your meal with a naturally sweet serving of fruit for dessert such as baked cinnamon-spiced apples served with nonfat vanilla yogurt.

3. Season without salt

Reducing the amount of sodium in your diet does not have to mean sacrificing flavor. When seasoning your meals, choose salt-free spice blends or add garlic, rosemary, thyme, lemon, and lime. Herbs such as sage, parsley, thyme, oregano, and basil bring flavor to salads, vegetables, fish, and meats without increasing the sodium content of the dish.

4. Keep sweets as a treat

Do you regularly snack on sweets? The DASH diet encourages keeping sweets to a minimum of five servings per week. Sweets include jam, candy, and sweetened beverages, so servings can add up fast!³ Try keeping track of how many added sugars you have in your current diet through a food diary and look for areas of opportunity to reduce the amount you are currently eating. If you find you're used to having a sugary treat at certain times of the day, try substituting with healthier alternatives. For example, pack naturally sweet dried fruit to eat in place of jelly beans or switch from regular soda to diet, as a start. Even one small change is a step in the right direction!

Sources:

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