



Healthy Lifestyle

Nutrition and healthy eating

Discover how DASH can help you lower your blood pressure and improve your health.

By Mayo Clinic Staff

DASH stands for Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension.

The **DASH** diet is a healthy-eating plan designed to help prevent or treat high blood pressure, also called hypertension. It also may help lower cholesterol linked to heart disease, called low density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol.

High blood pressure and high **LDL** cholesterol levels are two major risk factors for heart disease and stroke.

Foods in the **DASH** diet are rich in the minerals potassium, calcium and magnesium. The **DASH** diet focuses on vegetables, fruits and whole grains. It includes fat-free or low-fat dairy products, fish, poultry, beans and nuts.

The diet limits foods that are high in salt, also called sodium. It also limits added sugar and saturated fat, such as in fatty meats and full-fat dairy products.

The standard **DASH** diet limits salt to 2,300 milligrams (mg) a day. That amount agrees with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. That's about the amount of sodium in 1 teaspoon of table salt.

A lower sodium version of **DASH** restricts sodium to 1,500 mg a day. You can choose the version of the diet that meets your health needs. If you aren't sure what sodium level is right for you, talk to your health care provider.

The **DASH** diet is a balanced eating plan that gives choices of what to eat. The diet helps create a heart-healthy eating style for life. There's no need for special foods or drinks. Foods in the diet are at grocery stores and in most restaurants.

When following **DASH**, it is important to choose foods that are:

- Rich in potassium, calcium, magnesium, fiber and protein.
- Low in saturated fat.
- Low in salt.

The **DASH** diet provides daily and weekly nutritional goals. The number of servings depends on daily calorie needs.

Here's a look at the recommended servings from each food group for a 2,000-calorie-a-day **DASH** diet:

- **Grains: 6 to 8 servings a day.** One serving may be 1/2 cup of cooked cereal, rice or pasta, 1 slice of bread or 1 ounce dry cereal.
- **Vegetables: 4 to 5 servings a day.** One serving is 1 cup raw leafy green vegetable, 1/2 cup cut-up raw or cooked vegetables, or 1/2 cup vegetable juice.
- **Fruits: 4 to 5 servings a day.** One serving is one medium fruit, 1/2 cup fresh, frozen or canned fruit, or 1/2 cup fruit juice.
- **Fat-free or low-fat dairy products: 2 to 3 servings a day.** One serving is 1 cup milk or yogurt, or 1 1/2 ounces cheese.
- **Lean meats, poultry and fish: six 1-ounce servings or fewer a day.** One serving is 1 ounce of cooked meat, poultry or fish, or 1 egg.
- **Nuts, seeds, or dry beans and peas: 4 to 5 servings a week.** One serving is 1/3 cup nuts, 2 tablespoons peanut butter, 2 tablespoons seeds, or 1/2 cup cooked dried beans or peas, also called legumes.
- **Fats and oils: 2 to 3 servings a day.** One serving is 1 teaspoon soft margarine, 1 teaspoon vegetable oil, 1 tablespoon mayonnaise or 2 tablespoons salad dressing.
- **Sweets and added sugars: 5 servings or fewer a week.** One serving is 1 tablespoon sugar, jelly or jam, 1/2 cup sorbet or 1 cup lemonade.

DASH diet: Healthy eating to lower your blood pressure

Drinking too much alcohol can increase blood pressure. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends that men limit alcohol to no more than two drinks a day and women to one or less.

The DASH diet doesn't talk about caffeine. How caffeine affects blood pressure isn't clear. But caffeine can cause blood pressure to rise at least briefly.

If you have high blood pressure or if you think caffeine affects your blood pressure, think about cutting down. You might talk to your health care provider about caffeine.

The foods at the center of the **DASH** diet are low in salt. So following the **DASH** diet is likely to lower salt intake.

To further reduce salt:

- Read food labels and choose low-salt or no-salt-added options.
- Use salt-free spices or flavorings instead of salt.
- Don't add salt when cooking rice, pasta or hot cereal.
- Choose plain fresh or frozen vegetables.
- Choose fresh skinless poultry, fish and lean cuts of meat.
- Eat less restaurant food. When eating at restaurants, ask for dishes with less salt and ask not to have salt added to your order.

As you cut back on processed, salty foods, you might notice that food tastes different. It can take time for your taste buds to adjust. But once they do, you might prefer the DASH way of eating. And you'll be healthier for it.

Show References

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