

The DASH Eating Plan to Lower Blood Pressure and Cholesterol

The Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet is a heart-healthy eating plan proven to reduce cholesterol and blood pressure. Research shows that, if you have high blood pressure, following the DASH diet can lower your systolic blood pressure by as much as 11 points. Now that is a recipe for better health!

How It Works

Eat fresh, healthy foods

Enjoy plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables. Select a rainbow of colors. Include low-fat or fat-free dairy products, whole grain foods, fish, poultry and nuts.

Limit sodium (salt)

Limit your sodium to no more than 2,300 mg per day. If you have high blood pressure, your doctor may suggest you limit your sodium to no more than 1,500 mg per day.

Most of the sodium we eat comes from processed foods and restaurant meals. When grocery shopping, choose fresh and low-sodium foods. When dining out, add more vegetables and have smaller portions. Ask if there is a menu with nutrition information.

Watch for extra fat and sugar

Limit foods high in fat, cholesterol and sugar. This includes fatty meats, full-fat dairy products, sweets, sugar-sweetened beverages and many snack foods.

Compare food labels, then choose options lower in saturated fat and added sugars, with zero trans fat. Avoid foods with partially hydrogenated oils as an ingredient.

Choose whole grains

Not all grains are the same. At least half the servings of grains you eat each day should be whole grains. Enjoy whole-wheat pasta and bread, plus brown rice, barley, oatmeal, shredded wheat cereal, or popcorn. Eat less of refined grains such as white rice and items made with white wheat (pastries, pasta or bread).

Cook in a heart-healthy way

Choose healthy oils like olive, canola or avocado instead of butter. Add herbs and spices instead of salt. Bake, grill or steam food. Trim meats of excess fat and remove skin from poultry.



Sutter Resources

To find out more about nutrition, go to sutterhealth.org/health/nutrition.

Ask your healthcare team for a referral to a registered dietitian to make a personal DASH plan for you.

You may find local resources by going to sutterhealth.org/classes-events and selecting the topics “Heart Health” and “Nutrition.”

What Are Processed Foods?

Processed foods are generally any packaged food with a nutrition label. Many are high in unhealthy fats, salt and sugar such as snack foods, frozen meals and processed meats. Choose options lower in saturated fat, sodium (salt) and added sugars. Avoid foods with partially hydrogenated oils.

Servings

The DASH eating plan recommends food servings based on how many calories you eat per day. Here are serving examples for a 2,000-calorie-a-day diet. Your calorie needs may differ based on your age, activity level and health goals.

Food Group	What to Choose	Daily Servings
 Vegetables	Fresh, frozen or canned without added sauces, sodium or sugar.	4 to 5 Serving = 1 cup raw leafy greens; 1/2 cup raw, cut-up or cooked; 1/2 cup juice
 Fruits	Fresh, frozen or canned without added sauces, sodium or sugar.	4 to 5 Serving = 1 medium fruit; 1/2 cup fresh, frozen, or canned; 1/4 cup dried, 1/2 cup juice
 Dairy	Fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products.	2 to 3 Serving = 1 cup milk or yogurt, 1 1/2 oz cheese
 Grains	Mostly whole grains.	6 to 8 Serving = 1/2 cup cooked rice, pasta or cereal; 1 cup dry cereal; 1 slice bread
 Eggs and Lean Meats	Fish, poultry, lean meats, and eggs. Limit to 4 egg yolks per week.	6 or less Serving = 3 oz (about the size of a deck of cards) cooked meat, poultry or fish; 1 egg
 Fats and Oils	Vegetable oils (avocado, canola, corn, olive), soft margarines, low-fat dressings or mayonnaise.	2 to 3 Serving = 1 tsp oil or soft margarine, 1 Tbsp mayonnaise, 2 Tbsp salad dressing
 Sodium (Salt)	Limit sodium. Use herbs and spices instead.	2,300 mg (1 tsp) 1,500 mg (3/4 tsp)
Food Group	What to Choose	Weekly Servings
 Legumes, Nuts and Seeds	Dried or canned legumes (beans, lentils and split peas), without added sauces, sodium or sugar. Unsalted nuts, nut butters and seeds.	4 to 5 Serving = 1/2 cup cooked legumes, 1/3 cup nuts, 2 Tbsp seeds or nut butter
 Sweets	Sweets that are low in fat, such as gelatin, sorbet, hard candy and fruit drinks.	5 or less Serving = 1 Tbsp sugar or jelly, 1/2 cup sorbet or gelatin, 1 cup lemonade

Additional Resources

The DASH eating plan is recommended by the American National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. To find sample menus, go to nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/dash-eating-plan.