

# Healthy Eating: Lowering Your Blood Pressure with DASH<sup>1</sup>

Valerie Weyenberg, Karla P. Shelnutt, and Linda B. Bobroff<sup>2</sup>

About one-fourth of men and one-fifth of women between the ages of 35 and 44 have high blood pressure (CDC, 2016). A recent report (Cifu, 2017) places even more adults into the category of “elevated” blood pressure. 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 (AHA, 2016). 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. DASH 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 (NHLBI, 2015).



Figure 1. Following the DASH diet can help with weight management.

Credits: Brand X Pictures

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

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2. Valerie Weyenberg, MS, RD, former dietetic intern, Food Science and Human Nutrition Department; Karla P. Shelnutt, PhD, RD, associate professor; and Linda B. Bobroff, PhD, RDN, professor, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

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you lose weight if you are overweight. Losing excess body weight can help lower your blood pressure (NHLBI, 2015).

## 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 (NHLBI, 2015).

Food group recommendations in the DASH eating plan also are available for 1,200-, 1,400-, 1,600-, 1,800-, 2,000-, 2,600-, and 3,100-calorie diets. See <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/dash/followdash.html>.

Most older adults need fewer calories than younger adults. If you need more than 2,000 calories each day, you can add more servings.

Table 1. DASH food pattern for a 2,000-calorie meal plan.

Food Group	Servings per Day
Grains (most of your servings should be whole grain)	6–8
Vegetables	4–5
Fruits	4–5
Low-fat or fat-free dairy	2–3
Lean meats, poultry, and fish	6 or fewer
Nuts, seeds, or legumes	4–5 per week
Fats and oils	2–3
Sodium	2,300 mg*
Sweets	5 or fewer per week

**Source:** National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, 2015.

\*Limiting intake to 1,500 mg of sodium per day decreases blood pressure even further.

## What is a serving?

Here are some examples of one serving from each of the food groups. These can help in meal planning, but how much you eat at a meal or snack will depend on your calorie needs and your level of hunger.

### Grains

1 slice of bread

1 oz ready-to-eat cereal (½ cup to 1¼ cup—check Nutrition Facts label)

½ cup cooked rice, pasta, or cereal



Figure 2. The DASH diet is rich in whole grains and limits refined grain foods that do not provide dietary fiber. Credits: iStockphoto

### Vegetables

1 cup raw, leafy vegetables

½ cup cooked or cut-up raw vegetables

½ cup vegetable juice (choose lower sodium)



Figure 3. Brightly colored vegetables provide a variety of nutrients and phytochemicals needed for good health. They are naturally low in fat and sodium. Credits: iStockphoto

## Fruits

1 medium fresh fruit

½ cup fresh, frozen, or canned fruit

½ cup 100% fruit juice

¼ cup dried fruit



Figure 4. Bananas are one of many sources of potassium, a mineral that contributes to blood pressure control.

Credits: iStockphoto

## Low-Fat Dairy\*

1 cup milk or yogurt

1½ oz natural cheese

\*Use fat-free for fewer calories and fat

## Lean Meats, Poultry, and Fish

1 oz cooked meat, poultry, or fish\*

1 egg

\*Less than 3 g fat per oz

## Nuts, Seeds, and Legumes

⅓ cup or 1½ oz nuts

2 tbsp peanut butter

2 tbsp or ½ oz seeds

½ cup cooked dry beans or peas

¼ cup (about 2 oz) of tofu

2 tbsp hummus



Figure 5. Lean fish is a great source of protein and other critical nutrients.

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## Fats and Oils

1 tsp soft margarine or vegetable oil

1 tbsp mayonnaise (low-fat)

2 tbsp light salad dressing

2 tbsp avocado

## Sweets

1 tbsp sugar, jelly, or jam

1 cup lemonade

Sources: NHLBI (2015); USDA (2017)

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 EDIS document FY684, *Healthy Living: High Blood Pressure*, at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fy684>.

For information on how to make better dietary choices using the food label, see EDIS document FY1127, *Healthy Eating: Understanding the Nutrition Facts Label*, at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fy1127>.

## References

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