

## **DASH** to Better Health

The DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) Eating Plan has been extensively researched. Studies show that increasing exercise, watching sodium intake and changing your eating style to reflect the DASH approach can lower blood pressure as well as the need for medication.

Even if you don't have high blood pressure by the time you are age 55, you have a 90 percent chance of developing the problem in your lifetime. High blood pressure is called the "silent killer" because it lacks outward symptoms but increases the risk of heart attack, stroke and kidney disease.

What changes can you make to become more DASH oriented?

- **Choose whole grains.** Eat 7 to 8 servings a day. A serving is a slice of whole grain bread, ½ cup of whole grain rice, pasta or cereal or 1 cup of whole grain ready-to-eat cereal. Whole grains are higher in fiber, vitamins and minerals. When baking, substitute whole wheat flour for half of the white flour.
- **Increase fruits and vegetables.** Eat 4 to 5 servings of vegetables a day. A vegetable serving is one cup of leafy, raw veggies, ½ cup of cooked, and ½ cup of juice. For fruits, eat 4 to 5 servings a day which would be 1 medium fruit, ¼ cup dried, ½ cup fresh, frozen or canned, or ½ cup of fruit juice. Fruits and vegetables are excellent sources of fiber, as well as potassium and magnesium. Focus on using fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables as they contain much less sodium and/or sugar.
- **Include fat-free or low-fat dairy products.** Incorporate 2 to 3 servings per day. A serving is 1 cup of milk, 1 cup of yogurt, and 1½ ounces of cheese. Dairy products are an excellent source of calcium and protein and good sources of potassium and magnesium. Remember that cheese is a significant source of sodium, so avoid eating too much. If a person has problems digesting dairy foods, try cultured dairy foods such as buttermilk, yogurt or cottage cheese. Lactose-free milk is now available in most grocery stores, or try lactase enzyme pills or drops.
- **Choose lean meats.** Eat 6, or less, one ounce servings of cooked meat, poultry, fish or one egg. Meats contain protein and magnesium. Red meat can be included, but choose 90 percent lean and remove excess fat. Processed meats are very high in sodium, so choose hot dogs, breakfast meats and deli meats sparingly.
- **Incorporate nuts, seeds and legumes.** These are good sources of magnesium and potassium as well as fiber and protein. Serving sizes include ½ cup of cooked legumes (dried beans and peas), 1/3 cup or 1½ ounces of nuts, and 2 tablespoons, or ½ ounce, of seeds.

- **Limit fat to 2 to 3 servings per day.** A serving is 1 teaspoon of soft margarine or vegetable oil, 1 tablespoon of low fat-mayo, or 2 tablespoons of light salad dressing. Fat is an important part of our diet, but too much can cause weight gain and increase the risk of developing chronic diseases such as heart disease.
- **Sweets and sugars should be limited to 5 or less per week.** These amounts include one tablespoon of sugar, jelly, or jam, ½ cup of sorbet or gelatin, or one cup of lemonade.
- **Reduce sodium to about 1500 milligrams per day.** Processed foods contribute the greatest amount of sodium to the diet (77 percent). Foods that naturally contain sodium supply only 12 percent. Salt added during cooking or at mealtime also adds to the overall sodium intake each day.

Foods high in sodium include canned foods such as canned vegetables, tomato products, frozen pizza and microwave meals, cheese, processed meats, salad dressings, snack foods, instant cereals, and some condiments. Bread, bagels and English muffins also add to sodium in the diet. Whenever possible, choose a low or no sodium alternative. Read labels to determine which foods are lower in sodium. If there is not a low sodium option, choose a fresh or frozen alternative. Rather than enhancing the flavor of food with salt, try herbs and spices.

- **Exercise 30 minutes most days of the week.** If your blood pressure is moderately elevated, 30 minutes of brisk walking on most days of the week may be enough to keep you off medication. If you take medication for high blood pressure, 30 minutes of moderate physical activity can make your medication work more effectively and help you feel better. If you don't have high blood pressure, being physically active can help keep it within the recommended guidelines.

The DASH Eating Plan is not intended for weight loss but following the plan along with exercise may very well lead to weight loss. The one thing it can do is lower blood pressure and reduce the need for medication. **As always, visit with your doctor before making any changes in medication.**

#### **References:**

DASHing to Lower Blood Pressure, Colorado State University Extension Fact Sheet 9.374, [www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs](http://www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs)

Your Guide to Lowering Your Blood Pressure with DASH, [www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart).

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