

FitFacts®



What is the DASH Diet?

THE DASH DIET, WHICH STANDS FOR “DIETARY APPROACHES TO STOP HYPERTENSION”, IS A POPULAR EATING PLAN THAT IS RECOMMENDED FOR THE PREVENTION AND TREATMENT OF HYPERTENSION (OR HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE). IF YOU HAVE HYPERTENSION, YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER MAY ADVISE YOU TO USE THE DASH DIET ALONE OR COMBINED WITH MEDICATION IN ORDER TO DECREASE YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE TO A HEALTHY LEVEL.

Even if you don't have hypertension, the DASH eating plan is also ideal for shedding unwanted pounds as well as lowering cholesterol and blood sugar levels. It is a flexible plan that does not require any special foods and offers a variety of choices to fit individual tastes.

Follow these basic steps to begin living the DASH way:

- 1. Decrease your sodium intake.** The typical American diet contains too much sodium, which is a major contributor to high blood pressure.
 - **Toss the salt shaker**—Try substituting herbs, spices, lemon, lime, vinegar, or wine for added flavor.
 - **Read the nutrition label**—Processed foods have the highest sodium content. Choose “low sodium” foods, which contain 5% or less of the daily value (DV) of sodium.
 - **Be aware of your total sodium intake**—The DASH plan recommends an intake of no more than 2,300 mg of sodium per day. Depending on your health status, you may be advised to lower your target to 1,500mg or less per day. Remember, lower sodium intake can lead to better control of your blood pressure.
- 2. Load up on fruits and vegetables.**
 - Consume a variety of colors to get the maximum nutritional benefit.
 - Fresh, frozen, canned, and dried produce are all acceptable choices. However, be aware of the sodium content of canned foods and the sugar content of dried fruits.
 - Whole fruits and vegetables are preferred over juice, although 100% fruit or vegetable juices are acceptable in moderation.
- 3. Make most of your grains “whole grains.”**
 - “Whole grain” foods include products that list the whole grain(s) first or second on the ingredient list, those labeled as “100% whole grain,” and those with at least 8 grams of whole grain per ounce.
- 4. Switch to low-fat or fat-free dairy products.**
- 5. Eat lean meats, poultry, fish, and eggs.**
 - Limit red and processed meats, which have high saturated fat content.
- 6. Consume nuts, seeds, and legumes (cooked, dried beans and peas)**
 - Nuts contain heart-healthy fats, but are higher in calories. Pay close attention to serving sizes.

- Enjoy a meatless meal using soybean-based products and legumes 2+ times per week.
- 7. Use fats and oils sparingly**
 - Reduce your intake of saturated fat and especially steer clear of artery-clogging “trans fats,” which are both listed on the nutrition label. Trans fats can also be spotted as “partially hydrogenated oils” in the ingredient list.
 - 8. Decrease your intake of sweets and added sugars**
 - Instead of calling certain foods “off limits,” allow junk food in moderation.
 - 9. Combine DASH with regular physical activity**
 - A physically active lifestyle is essential for good blood pressure, weight loss, and overall health
 - Aim for 150 minutes of moderate physical activity per week (for example, brisk walking for 30 minutes, most days of the week).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[American Council on Exercise](#)

[U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#)

[National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute](#)

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