

DASH EATING PLAN

Nutrition and health experts originally designed the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension, or DASH eating plan, as a way to help lower blood pressure. But recent studies have also found the DASH plan to be one of the best options to prevent heart disease, stroke, diabetes and even some forms of cancer. Research also shows the DASH plan is safe and effective for short-term and permanent weight loss.

The DASH eating plan was recently ranked the No. 1 overall diet by U.S. News & World Report. The authors of the U.S. News report found that the DASH plan is easy to follow because it does not restrict entire food groups. And because the plan focuses on fresh fruits and vegetables, controlling calories is easier than with other diet plans.

What is the DASH eating plan?

The DASH plan is promoted by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, part of the National Institutes of Health. The plan helps reduce the risk for serious health problems because it is low in:

- Saturated fat
- Cholesterol
- Total fat
- Red meat
- Sweets
- Sugary beverages

The DASH plan encourages:

- Fruits
- Vegetables
- Fat-free or low-fat milk and dairy products
- Whole-grain foods
- Fish
- Poultry
- Nuts

The DASH plan is also rich in important nutrients such as:

- Potassium
- Magnesium
- Calcium
- Protein
- Fiber

Tips for following the DASH plan

To reduce the amount of sodium in your diet, try these steps:

- Choose fresh, frozen or canned vegetables that have low sodium or no added salt.
- Use fresh poultry, fish or meat instead of canned, smoked or processed.
- Limit cured foods such as bacon and ham, foods packed in brine, and condiments.
- Cook rice or pasta without salt.
- Cut back on frozen dinners, packaged mixes, and canned soups or broths.

- Rinse canned foods such as tuna and canned beans to remove some of the salt.
- Use spices instead of salt to flavor foods.
- Add fruit to breakfast or have it as a snack.

- Treat meat as one part of the whole meal, instead of the main focus.

Some days you might eat more sodium or fewer foods from one group than the plan suggests. But don't worry. Try your best to keep the average on most days close to the DASH plan levels.

Serving recommendations

Below is a chart showing how much of each food group you should eat every day, based on eating 2,000 calories per day.

| SERVING | SERVING SIZE |
|---|--|
| 6-8 servings of whole grains | 1 slice bread, 1 oz. dry cereal, ½ cup cooked rice or pasta |
| 4-5 servings of vegetables | 1 cup raw, leafy vegetable; ½ cup cut-up raw or cooked vegetable |
| 4-5 servings of fruits | 1 medium fruit; ¼ cup dried fruit; ½ cup fresh, frozen or canned fruit; ½ cup fruit juice |
| 2-3 servings of fat-free or low-fat dairy | 1 cup milk or yogurt, 1.5 oz. cheese |
| Up to 6 servings of lean meat, poultry, fish | 1 oz. cooked meat, poultry, or fish; 1 egg |
| 4-5 servings per week of nuts, seeds, legumes | 1/3 cup or 1.5 oz. nuts, 2 tablespoons peanut butter, 2 tablespoons or ½ oz. seeds, ½ cup cooked dry beans or peas |
| 2-3 servings of fats and oils | 1 teaspoon soft margarine, 1 teaspoon vegetable oil, 1 tablespoon mayonnaise, 2 tablespoons salad dressing |
| Up to 5 servings per week of sweets | 1 tablespoon sugar, 1 tablespoon jelly or jam, ½ cup sorbet or gelatin, 1 cup lemonade |

Information courtesy of the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute.