

Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH)

Hypertension is another name for high blood pressure. Blood pressure is the force exerted on artery walls when the heart is beating and when it is at rest. The higher number is the "Systolic" pressure and is the pressure exerted on artery walls when the heart is in the contracting phase. The lower number is the "Diastolic" pressure and is the pressure exerted on artery walls when the heart is in the resting phase.

High blood pressure is a silent killer. If left unchecked, it can cause permanent damage, resulting in kidney failure, heart attack or stroke. Blood pressure is recorded in the form of a fraction with the higher number on the top and the lower number on the bottom. Blood pressure is considered high if the upper number (systolic pressure) is above 140 and the bottom number (diastolic pressure) is above 90 and stays there.

High blood pressure (HBP) affects two thirds of African-Americans. Left unchecked, it can have such serious long-term consequences as kidney damage, heart damage and stroke. African Americans suffer more extensive physical impairments from stroke that last longer than those of other racial groups.

Most of the time, the cause for high blood pressure cannot be determined, but, while the cause may not be known, the treatment can still be effective.

- **Adjust your diet (see guidelines below).**
- **Maintain a healthy weight.**
- **Incorporate regular exercise into your daily routine. Walk or engage in other aerobic activity for a minimum of 30-40 minutes daily*.**

Dietary Interventions:

1. **Limit salt/sodium.** Most medical experts recommend limiting salt to 2,000 milligrams per day. In the second DASH study, the most dramatic drop in blood pressure levels occurred when sodium was limited to 1500mg/day. Watch out for "hidden" salt, found in butter flavorings, seasonings, tomato sauces, condiments and canned foods. Check with your healthcare practitioner before using a salt substitute.
2. **Limit intake of high-fat foods.** Try baking or broiling rather than frying.
3. **Limit alcohol.** Over consumption contributes to weakening of the heart muscle and to hypertension.
4. **Follow the DASH diet.** The DASH diet was designed to prevent high blood pressure, but it's also low in fat. The DASH diet below is based on a 2,000-calorie-a-day meal plan. Check with your healthcare practitioner about whether the DASH diet may be the right diet for you.

The DASH Diet for Control of High Blood Pressure		
Food group	Daily Servings	Nutritional Benefit
Low-fat or fat-free dairy	2-3	Calcium, potassium, magnesium and protein
Vegetables	4-5	Potassium, magnesium and fiber
Fruits	4-5	Potassium, magnesium and fiber
Grains and grain products	7-8	Carbohydrates and fiber
Meat, Poultry and fish	2 or fewer	Protein and magnesium
Nuts, seeds and beans	4-5 per week	Magnesium, potassium, protein and fiber
Fats and oils**	2-3	This applies to added fat; all other food choices should be low-fat
Sweets	5 per week	Make these treats low-fat whenever possible
Source: NIH		

* Check with your healthcare practitioner before starting an exercise program.