

Blood Pressure and the DASH Diet

Blood Pressure: What is it?

Blood pressure is the force of blood against artery walls. It is measured in millimeters of mercury (mmHg) and recorded as two numbers—systolic pressure (when the heart beats) over diastolic pressure (when the heart relaxes between beats).

- Normal blood pressure is less than 120/80 mmHg.
- High blood pressure—or hypertension—is blood pressure greater than 140/90 mmHg.
- Prehypertension (between normal and high blood pressure values) can lead to high blood pressure unless preventive steps are taken.

Hypertension: Who has it?

Approximately 65 million adults in America—one in three—have hypertension, a major risk factor for heart disease, stroke and kidney disease. *Hypertension has no symptoms and is often called the “silent killer” as it can damage your heart, blood vessels, kidneys and other parts of your body without you realizing it.*

- After age 50, the incidence of high blood pressure increases.
- More African-Americans have hypertension than Caucasians or Hispanics.



What does the DASH diet consist of?

- ✓ This diet is composed of whole foods—fresh, frozen, canned and dried—that taste good and are readily available in supermarkets.
- ✓ There is no need for supplements, special foods or fat substitutes. Let USDA’s MyPlate be the guide for foods from each food group.

www.MyPlate.gov



What are the Risk Factors for Hypertension?

- Excessive body weight
- High salt or sodium intake
- Too much alcohol
- Sedentary lifestyle
- Tobacco use

Can Diet Make a Difference?

Repeated studies have found that a **diet rich in fruits, vegetables and low-fat dairy foods, with reduced saturated and total fat, can substantially lower blood pressure.** This diet is called the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) Diet.

- The DASH Diet is as effective as some medications at lowering blood pressure in patients with mild hypertension. If you’re taking medication, don’t stop, but ask your physician if you should try the DASH Diet.
- The DASH Diet may prevent or delay the need for medication in prehypertensive people.
- People who follow the DASH Diet AND a low sodium diet have the greatest reduction in blood pressure.

In addition, maintain a healthy weight, use less salt and limit alcoholic beverages.
Consult a physician for specific advice on sodium intake.