

Ask Dr. Tastebud

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*Dear Dr. Tastebud,
This week was my 55th birthday and I visited my Doctor for my annual check-up. He informed me that my blood pressure is higher than normal. He suggested that I first make dietary changes to before turning to medication. He recommended the DASH diet. What is the DASH diet?*

*Sincerely,
Future DASHer*

Dear Future DASHer,

Excellent question! Hypertension, or high blood pressure, can be unhealthy even if it stays only slightly above 119/79 mm Hg (120/80 is now considered pre-hypertension). As this number rises, your health risk becomes greater. Congestive heart failure and kidney failure can result from chronic hypertension. One in three adults in America is affected by high blood pressure.

There are several ways to control your high blood pressure. These include maintaining a healthy body weight, being physically active, following a healthy eating plan, and drinking alcoholic beverages in moderation. If medication is prescribed, take it as directed.

What is the DASH eating plan?

The DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet is supported by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI). Findings from their studies have shown that blood pressure can be reduced through an eating plan that is low in saturated fat, cholesterol, total fat, and also emphasizes fruits, vegetables, and low-fat



milk and dairy products. These are the basic principles of the DASH diet.

As you can see, the DASH diet is a heart healthy diet and all adults can benefit from following its guidelines.

The DASH isn't a Race

The DASH diet does not require any special foods or complicated recipes. Getting started can be simple and should be gradual. Start by adding a serving of vegetables at lunch and dinner. Use fruits as desserts, morning pick-me-ups, and midday snacks. Try drinking low-fat milk at dinner instead of sugary beverages. Begin reading Nutrition Facts on food labels to compare saturated and trans fats, sodium, and cholesterol amounts. Choose whole grains which are full of nutrients, such as fiber.

Protein sources may include meats, beans, and legumes. Choose lean cuts of meat and remember that a typical serving size is three ounces, which is about the size of a deck of cards. Meat should be limited to six ounces a day.

Remember that the entire family can eat meals following the DASH diet.

The DASH diet and Minerals

Sodium

- Daily sodium intake should be 2,300 milligrams or less. This looks like one teaspoon of salt. However, blood pressure may be lowered further by