

DASH Your High Blood Pressure with this Diet

May is National High Blood Pressure Education Awareness Month. Did you know that about 73 million people in the United States have high blood pressure? High blood pressure, also known as hypertension, can increase your risk for heart disease and stroke, the first and third leading causes of death in the United States¹. Another 59 million people have pre-hypertension which increases the chances of developing high blood pressure and its other complications including kidney disease and blindness. An ideal blood pressure reading is less than 120/80 mmHg, and high blood pressure is diagnosed when you have several readings at or above 140/90 mmHg. There are many causes of high blood pressure, from genetics and stress, to diet and lifestyle choices. Once high blood pressure is diagnosed, changes in diet and lifestyle are recommended, and for some, medications may be necessary².

Eating for Better Blood Pressure

What you eat greatly affects your chances of developing high blood pressure. The DASH diet, which stands for Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension, has been shown to improve blood pressure control and may even decrease your need for medication. The main idea behind the diet is to add healthy foods that will help improve your blood pressure instead of restricting foods or entire food groups.



Here are the main recommendations of The DASH diet:

1. Eat more fruits and vegetables, try for 8-12 servings per day.
2. Eat 2-4 servings of low to non-fat dairy every day.
3. Eat mostly whole grains in place of refined.
4. Include lean proteins, fish, beans and nuts.
5. Eat foods high in the nutrients potassium, magnesium, and calcium.
6. Eat less sodium, less cholesterol and limit unhealthy fats (trans and saturated).

On average, most Americans barely eat 2-3 total servings of fruits and veggies each day which can make it challenging to start this diet³. One thing to consider is visiting your local Farmer's Market to keep well-stocked with seasonal produce. Applying the principles of the DASH diet can improve your current health and keep you well in the long run.

Tips for Healthy Blood Pressure

- Check your blood pressure regularly.
- Follow the DASH Diet.
- Reduce your salt.
- Drink alcohol in moderation.
- Be physically active everyday.
- Quit smoking.



References:

1. CDC Features, May is High Blood Pressure Month, Accessed at: <http://www.cdc.gov/Features/HighBloodPressure/>, April 2010.
2. Mahan, L. Kathleen, Escott-Stump, Sylvia. *Krause's Food and Nutrition Therapy*. 12th ed. St. Louis, MO, Saunders Elsevier, 2008
3. Lowering Your Blood Pressure with DASH. DASH Eating Plan Lower Your Blood Pressure. Us Dept of Health and Human Services, NHLBI. NIH Publication No. 06-4082, 2006, Accessed at: http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/hbp/dash/new_dash.pdf