

## The DASH Eating Plan

*A proven, flexible approach to eating that lowers blood pressure and improves heart health*

### What Is the DASH Eating Plan?

**DASH** stands for **Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension**. It is a flexible, balanced eating plan developed by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) to help lower high blood pressure and improve overall heart health — without special foods or complicated rules.

The DASH plan focuses on what you *add* to your diet, not just what you cut out. It is rich in vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and lean proteins, and low in sodium, saturated fat, and added sugars.

Eat More Of:	Eat Less Of:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vegetables and fruits</li> <li>• Whole grains</li> <li>• Low-fat or fat-free dairy</li> <li>• Fish, poultry, beans, nuts</li> <li>• Vegetable oils</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High-sodium / processed foods</li> <li>• Fatty meats and full-fat dairy</li> <li>• Tropical oils (coconut, palm)</li> <li>• Sugar-sweetened drinks</li> <li>• Sweets and added sugars</li> </ul>

### Health Benefits of DASH

Decades of NHLBI-funded research involving thousands of adults have confirmed that the DASH eating plan produces meaningful, measurable health improvements:

<b>Lowers blood pressure</b>	DASH reduces systolic blood pressure by an average of 8–14 points — comparable to some blood pressure medications. The effect is even greater when combined with a low-sodium diet (1,500 mg/day).
<b>Improves cholesterol</b>	DASH lowers LDL ("bad") cholesterol, a major risk factor for heart attack and stroke.
<b>Reduces risk of heart disease &amp; stroke</b>	Following DASH long-term significantly lowers the risk of cardiovascular disease.
<b>Helps manage or prevent Type 2 diabetes</b>	DASH improves insulin sensitivity and helps control blood sugar levels.
<b>Supports healthy weight loss</b>	When combined with exercise and appropriate calorie intake, DASH helps with sustainable weight management.
<b>Benefits everyone</b>	Research shows DASH works for men and women of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, with and without high blood pressure.

*The greatest blood pressure benefit comes from combining the DASH diet with reduced sodium intake. Even modest reductions in sodium make a meaningful difference.*

## Sodium: The Key to Getting the Most from DASH

Sodium (salt) is one of the biggest drivers of high blood pressure. Most Americans consume about 3,600 mg of sodium per day — well above recommended levels. DASH works best when combined with lower sodium intake.

Sodium Level	Amount	Who It's For
Standard DASH	2,300 mg/day (~1 tsp salt)	General population; a good starting goal for most people
Lower-Sodium DASH	1,500 mg/day (~2/3 tsp salt)	Greater blood pressure benefit; recommended by your doctor if your BP is high

## How to Cut Sodium Every Day

### Shopping

- Choose fresh or frozen vegetables — not canned (or rinse canned ones before using).
- Pick fresh, unprocessed poultry, fish, and lean meats over cured or deli options.
- Read labels — choose products with less than 140 mg sodium per serving.
- Skip flavored rice, pasta mixes, and instant noodles — they're loaded with sodium.

### Cooking

- Don't add salt to pasta, rice, or cereal while cooking.
- Season with herbs, spices, garlic, lemon juice, or vinegar instead of salt.
- Rinse canned beans, vegetables, and fish before use.
- Use salt-free spice blends and marinades.

### Eating Out

- Ask for sauces, dressings, and gravies on the side.
- Request food prepared without added salt or MSG.
- Avoid pickled, cured, smoked, or brined menu items.
- Choose a side salad or vegetables instead of fries or chips.

## Making DASH a Lifestyle

The DASH eating plan works best as part of a complete heart-healthy lifestyle. Small, consistent changes add up to lasting results. You don't have to be perfect from day one — try making one change at a time.

<b>Be physically active</b>	Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate activity (brisk walking, swimming, cycling) most days of the week. Exercise and DASH together lower blood pressure more than either alone.
<b>Maintain a healthy weight</b>	Losing even 5–10 lbs can meaningfully lower blood pressure. DASH combined with calorie awareness supports gradual, sustainable weight loss.
<b>Limit alcohol</b>	Drinking too much alcohol raises blood pressure. If you drink, limit to 1 drink/day for women or 2 drinks/day for men.
<b>Manage stress</b>	Chronic stress can raise blood pressure. Try relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, meditation, or gentle yoga.
<b>Get enough sleep</b>	Poor sleep is linked to high blood pressure and weight gain. Aim for 7–9 hours per night.
<b>Quit smoking</b>	Smoking damages blood vessels and raises heart disease risk. Ask your doctor about cessation support.

## Tips for Getting Started

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start with one meal — swap your usual lunch for a DASH-friendly option this week.</li> <li>• Add one extra serving of vegetables or fruit each day for the first week.</li> <li>• Switch from white bread to whole grain bread — same sandwich, more fiber.</li> <li>• Replace soda or sweetened drinks with water, sparkling water, or unsweetened tea.</li> <li>• Try cooking without added salt for one week and use herbs and spices instead.</li> <li>• Swap chips or crackers for unsalted nuts or fresh fruit as your afternoon snack.</li> <li>• Read one nutrition label per grocery trip — look at sodium first.</li> <li>• Plan your meals for the week ahead — it makes healthy choices much easier.</li> </ul>
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## The DASH Eating Plan: Daily & Weekly Goals

The table below shows daily and weekly serving goals for a **2,000-calorie** diet. Your nephrologist or dietitian can adjust these targets based on your calorie needs. Note: if you have CKD, some DASH foods (such as high-potassium fruits and vegetables) may need to be limited — always follow your doctor's guidance.

Food Group	Daily Servings (2,000 cal)	What Counts as 1 Serving	Why It Matters
Grains (whole grains preferred)	6–8	1 slice bread; 1 oz dry cereal; ½ cup cooked rice, pasta, or cereal	Energy and fiber; lowers LDL cholesterol
Vegetables	4–5	1 cup raw leafy greens; ½ cup cut raw or cooked vegetables; ½ cup vegetable juice	Potassium, magnesium, fiber; lowers BP
Fruits	4–5	1 medium fruit; ¼ cup dried fruit; ½ cup fresh, frozen, or canned fruit; ½ cup juice	Potassium, magnesium, fiber; lowers BP
Low-fat / fat-free dairy	2–3	1 cup milk or yogurt; 1.5 oz cheese	Calcium, protein; supports bone health and BP
Lean meats, poultry & fish	6 or fewer	1 oz cooked lean meat, poultry, or fish; 1 egg	Protein, magnesium, B vitamins
Nuts, seeds, dry beans & peas	4–5 per week	1.5 oz nuts; 2 tbsp peanut butter; 2 tbsp seeds; ½ cup cooked beans or peas	Magnesium, potassium, protein, fiber
Fats & oils	2–3	1 tsp soft margarine or vegetable oil; 1 tbsp low-fat mayo; 2 tbsp light salad dressing	Heart-healthy fats; choose unsaturated oils
Sweets & added sugars	5 or fewer per week	1 tbsp sugar, jam, or jelly; ½ cup sorbet; 1 cup lemonade	Limit to keep calories and sugar low
Sodium	2,300 mg/day (or 1,500 mg for greater BP benefit)	About 1 teaspoon of table salt total across the whole day — including what's in packaged foods	Reducing sodium amplifies DASH's BP-lowering effect

*\* CKD patients: Nuts, seeds, beans, and many fruits and vegetables are high in potassium and/or phosphorus. Work with your nephrologist and renal dietitian to adapt DASH to your specific kidney diet needs.*

## A Sample DASH Day (2,000 Calories)

Here is an example of what a full day on the DASH eating plan could look like. Portions and choices can be adjusted to fit your calorie needs and any dietary restrictions your doctor has given you.

<b>Breakfast</b>	• 1 cup oatmeal topped with ½ cup blueberries and 1 tbsp chopped walnuts • 1 cup fat-free milk • 1 slice whole wheat toast with 1 tsp soft margarine • 1 cup unsweetened orange juice (or a whole orange)
<b>Morning Snack</b>	• 1 medium apple • Small handful (1 oz) unsalted almonds
<b>Lunch</b>	• Grilled chicken sandwich on a whole wheat roll with lettuce and tomato • 1 cup vegetable soup (low-sodium) • 1 cup fat-free milk • ½ cup fresh fruit salad
<b>Afternoon Snack</b>	• 1 cup low-fat yogurt • 4 whole wheat crackers
<b>Dinner</b>	• 3 oz baked salmon • 1 cup brown rice with herbs • 1 cup steamed broccoli with lemon • Side salad with 2 tbsp light vinaigrette • 1 small whole grain dinner roll • Water or unsweetened sparkling water

## Quick Reference: Foods to Choose & Limit

Choose More Often	Choose Less Often
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fresh / frozen vegetables and fruits</li> <li>• Whole grains (oats, brown rice, whole wheat)</li> <li>• Fat-free or low-fat milk, yogurt, cheese</li> <li>• Skinless poultry and fish</li> <li>• Unsalted nuts, seeds, and legumes</li> <li>• Olive oil, canola oil, avocado oil</li> <li>• Herbs, spices, lemon juice, vinegar</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Processed and packaged foods</li> <li>• Cured / deli meats, bacon, sausage</li> <li>• Full-fat dairy and fatty meats</li> <li>• Butter, lard, palm / coconut oil</li> <li>• Salty snacks, canned soups, fast food</li> <li>• Sodas and sweetened beverages</li> <li>• Desserts, candy, and added sugars</li> </ul>

<p><b>Questions about your diet?</b> Talk to your provider at your next visit or call: <b>219-931-5227</b></p>	<p><b>Our Locations:</b> Munster · Gary · Merrillville Michigan City · Portage Valparaiso · Whiting, IN</p>	<p><b>Online:</b> ns-nwi.com</p>
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