

# Living better with heart failure by changing what you eat

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Diet can dramatically lower hypertension and improve heart function in patients with a common type of heart failure, according to research presented at today's Heart Failure Society of America meeting in Orlando, Fla.

After 21 days of following a low-sodium Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) eating plan, patients saw a drop in blood pressure similar to taking anti-hypertension medicine.

"Our work suggests diet could play an important role in the progression of [heart failure](#), although patients should always talk to their doctor before making major dietary changes," says Scott Hummel, M.D., cardiologist at the University of Michigan Frankel Cardiovascular Center.

"We're excited to confirm these results in longer-term studies that also help us understand the challenges patients face when they try to improve their eating habits."

Heart failure with preserved [ejection fraction](#), or "diastolic" heart failure, happens when the heart becomes stiff and does not pump out enough blood. The condition is found in more than half of older adults with heart failure. Although taking diuretics to help the body get rid of extra fluid is useful, this type of heart failure has no standard treatment.

The [heart failure patients](#), most of them in their 60s and 70s, agreed to

keep [food diaries](#) and eat only the meals prepared for them in the metabolic kitchen at the University of Michigan Clinical Research Unit.

The meals, which could be picked up and heated at home, matched the DASH diet eating plan, which is high in potassium, magnesium, calcium and antioxidants and is recommended for hypertension treatment by the National Institutes of Health and the American Heart Association.

The study diet also contained a daily sodium intake of no more than 1,150 milligrams. That's much lower than what adults in the United States usually eat – about 4,200 mg a day for men, and 3,300 mg a day for women.

Doctors have long known that the low-sodium DASH diet can lower blood pressure in salt-sensitive patients.

The U-M study, although small, showed the DASH diet can improve left ventricular relaxation and reduce diastolic chamber stiffness, meaning a more efficient transfer of blood between the heart and arteries, Hummel says.

**More information:** [circheartfailure.ahajournals.o ...  
MD8S1Czj&keytype=ref](https://circheartfailure.ahajournals.org/lookup/doi/10.1161/CircHeartFailure.113.002511)

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