

The DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) [diet](#) has been around for almost 25 years and it's still one of the top diets recommended for overall good health and heart disease prevention.

One recent study of the DASH diet published in the [Journal of the American College of Cardiology](#) found "some of the strongest evidence that diet directly impacts cardiac damage, and our findings show that dietary interventions can improve cardiovascular risk factors in a relatively short time period," study author Dr. Stephen Juraschek, an assistant professor of medicine at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center (BIDMC) and Harvard Medical School, in Boston, said at the [time](#).

Juraschek added that the DASH diet reinforces the importance of a low-sodium diet rich in fruits, veggies and [whole grains](#).

What is the DASH diet?

DASH was originally created to help with high [blood pressure](#), based on studies sponsored by the [U.S. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute \(NHLBI\)](#).

It is a list of daily and weekly nutritional goals, rather than a specific meal plan, according to the NHLBI.

Comprised of eating vegetables, fruits and whole grains, fat-free and low-fat dairy products, fish, poultry, beans, nuts and [vegetable oils](#), DASH limits fatty meats, full-fat dairy, tropical oils, sugar-sweetened beverages and sweets.

Foods should be low in both saturated and trans fats, as well as sodium. They should be high in potassium, calcium, magnesium, fiber and protein, according to the NHLBI.

One modification swaps 10% of carbohydrates for proteins or unsaturated fats, according to the [National Institutes of Health](#) (NIH).

Benefits of the DASH diet

The diet tied for first place as best for healthy eating and for being heart-healthy in the 2021 Best Diets Report from U.S. News & World Report, according to the NIH.

Following it lowers [high blood pressure](#), improves cholesterol and helps prevent type 2 diabetes, while cutting the chances of kidney and heart disease, heart failure and stroke, according to the [National Library of Medicine](#).

The combination of nutrients and less sodium lowers blood pressure, but even without altering sodium intake, following the other parts of the diet was still good at lowering hypertension, according to the NIH.

Also limit alcohol and packaged foods, the U.S. National Library of Medicine says.

In its 2021 scientific statement on dietary guidance, the American Heart Association recommended both the Mediterranean and the DASH diets for good heart health.

People who follow those heart-[healthy eating](#) patterns have up to a 28% lower cardiovascular death rate, according to the guidance, which cited past research.

DASH diet food list

This diet recommends eating certain quantities of each of the specified

food groups, a number that may vary based on body size. A doctor can help individuals figure out the particulars, but the NHLBI gives a [guideline](#) based on a 2,000-calorie diet for an average-size person.

This includes:

- Grains: 6 to 8 servings daily
- Meats, poultry and fish: 6 ounces or fewer daily
- Vegetables: 4 to 5 daily servings
- Fruits: 4 to 5 daily servings
- Low-fat or fat-free dairy: 2 to 3 daily servings
- Fats and oils: 2 to 3 daily servings
- Sodium: up to 2,300 mg per day, 1,500 mg daily would be even better
- Nuts, seeds, dry beans and peas: 4 to 5 weekly servings
- Sweets: 5 or fewer weekly servings

Fats should provide 30% or fewer of a person's daily calories. Get about 4,700 milligrams (mg) of daily potassium by eating a mix of foods such as bananas, potatoes, avocados, tomatoes, soybeans, apricots, citrus fruits, yogurt and tuna. People who have kidney problems should check with their doctors before adding this much daily potassium.

Getting started on the DASH diet meal plan

Start slowly, experts suggest. Keep servings of meat small. Add one serving of fruit or veggies each day to increase gradually. Slowly add more vegetarian meals to your diet.

Read nutrition labels, the AHA [recommends](#).

[Harvard Health](#) suggests some potential ways to add in DASH-approved foods.

Load up on fruits and veggies at breakfast, adding them to an egg white omelet or smoothie, suggests Kathy McManus, director of the department of nutrition at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. Have a big salad for lunch with lean protein like beans or tuna, a sprinkling of nuts or grains and a drizzle of olive oil.

Stir fries, veggie chili or whole-grain pasta dishes are some other DASH-friendly options.

"Following this diet will provide all the nutrients you need. It is safe for both adults and children. It is low in saturated fat and high in fiber, an eating style that is recommended for everyone," according to the National Library of Medicine's [primer](#) on the DASH diet.

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