

## Get heart-healthy with a DASH diet



**H**igh blood pressure affects more than a billion people around the world. The American Heart Association says an estimated 103 million adults in the United States, nearly half of all men and women in the country, have hypertension. Statistics Canada estimates that around 18 percent of Canadians aged 12 and older have high blood pressure. While medication and lifestyle changes can help reduce blood pressure, a modified diet also can work wonders.

**The Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension diet, often referred to as “DASH,” is an approach to eating that is designed to help treat or prevent hypertension, according to the Mayo Clinic.** The diet was developed in the 1990s by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, which is part of the National Institutes of Health. The DASH does not require special foods, but makes recommendations on choices that can alleviate high blood pressure. The diet recommends eating vegetables, fruits and whole grains. Fat-free or low-fat dairy products, fish, poultry, beans, nuts, and vegetable oils are also included. Individuals adhering to the DASH diet should limit foods high in saturated fat, including fatty meats and tropical oils. Sugar-sweetened beverages and other sweets should be limited, too. When consuming foods, the idea is to stay within 1,500 to 2,300 milligrams of sodium.



**The DASH diet is characterized by an emphasis on fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean protein sources.**

In addition to reducing blood pressure, the DASH diet can lead to weight loss and even reduce adherents' cancer risk, advises the health resource Healthline. To help cut back on sodium, DASH guidelines advise using sodium-free spices to add flavor to foods. A person also can rinse canned foods to reduce salt or buy products that say sodium-free or low-sodium. Because no-salt foods can seem bland to those accustomed to salt, the Mayo Clinic suggests gradually cutting back on salted products until the taste buds can get used to less salty foods that fit within the DASH diet guidelines. Combining the DASH diet with exercise is a great way to reduce blood pressure even more naturally. Hypertension is a problem that can have lasting effects if not addressed. The DASH diet is one way to keep blood pressure levels in a healthy range.



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