

DASH Diet Decoded

DASH stands for Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (high blood pressure). If you have high blood pressure, this plan is designed to help you lower it and protect your heart.

DASH also makes sense for anyone who wants to eat for good health. *The DASH diet includes:*

- 4-5 daily servings each of fruits and vegetables.
- 2-3 daily servings of fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products.
- 2 3-ounce daily servings of meat, poultry or fish.
- 6-8 daily servings of whole grains.
- 2,300mg of sodium per day maximum (1 tsp. salt).
- Limited fats, sweets and added sugars.

Tip: To learn serving sizes, go to www.nhlbi.nih.gov and enter "NHLBI serving size card" in the search window.

This plan works because it limits sodium and is rich in potassium, magnesium and calcium. These minerals are essential to healthy blood pressure; you'll benefit more by consuming them in food than in supplements.

► Take a closer look at the DASH food plan at www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/dash/.



February is Heart Month.

Love Your Heart — At Every Age

You're never too young or too old to take care of your heart. Make smart heart choices now to help keep your heart beating strong.

In your 20s:

- Find a provider and start heart screenings, including blood pressure, cholesterol and body mass index.
- Be physically active. If you start the exercise habit early, you're more likely to stick with it as you age.
- Don't smoke. Smoking may be the most physically damaging health habit of all.



In your 30s:

- Long-term stress can damage your arteries. Find time every day for relaxation.
- Identify any cardiovascular problems in close relatives, such as stroke, heart attack and diabetes. Then take preventive steps to reduce your risks.



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Jump Into a Pool Workout

Take a break from your landlubber exercise routine and check out your local pool fitness classes. Aquatic programs now incorporate several forms of exercise.

For example, you might start with cardio lap swimming or dance; move on to a session that targets isolated muscle groups for strengthening; or slow the pace with a routine inspired by yoga, Pilates or tai chi that promotes flexibility and balance.

You'll find water exercise can be strenuous. You're continually moving against the resistance of water, so you tend to use a lot of muscle to move the water around you.

Water exercise is especially beneficial if:

- You have heart disease risk factors or have had a heart attack. The increased oxygen flow from aerobic exercise helps strengthen cardiovascular fitness.
- You have arthritis. The reduced effect of gravity in the water allows you to move with less impact than when on land. This allows you to work on joint flexibility and muscular strength in greater comfort. For these reasons, aquatic exercise is also ideal for overweight folks.
- You're recovering from an injury. The buoyancy of water might allow you to safely exercise without stressing the injured area.



BEST ADVICE

First, get your provider's approval if you have any of the conditions listed above or if you're unaccustomed to exercise. Don't be afraid to ask about your personal safety precautions and the instructor's qualifications.

All life is an experiment. The more experiments you make, the better. — Ralph Waldo Emerson



Health Fraud: Get in the Know

Many people want to believe that all medical products offered are safe and beneficial to them. However, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) warns that you can't always believe what you see or hear. The FDA offers these red flags for spotting a possible scam:

- A product that claims to cure a wide range of unrelated diseases, particularly serious diseases such as cancer and diabetes.
- Anything that offers a "quick fix," "cure-all," "scientific breakthrough" or "no-risk guarantee."
- Any company that asks for your private information (Social Security number, etc.) in exchange for a "free" offer.
- Any product that claims to be a "natural" cure.
- Company or product information that uses a lot of meaningless medical jargon.

► **The bottom line:** If it's a little-known treatment, speak with your health care provider first. The treatment may have dangerous side effects or interfere with your existing medications.

Love Your Heart ...

(Continued)

In your 40s:

- Lose the extra pounds. Midlife, your metabolism starts slowing down, often leading to weight gain. However, exercise burns calories and helps boost metabolism.
- Help your arteries with good nutrition: more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains and fewer sweets, saturated fats and trans fats.
- Have your blood sugar checked by age 45. Your provider may suggest it earlier or more frequently if you're overweight or at high risk.



In your 50s and 60s:

- Don't skip your heart health screenings.
- Learn the warning signs of heart attack and stroke.
- Exercise at least 30 minutes, five days a week. Fit in two to three strength training workouts weekly.



Whatever your age, these strategies don't take much effort. Can you give your heart a few minutes every day to keep it strong?



Smart moves toolkit is at www.personalbest.com/extras/feb13tools.

Better-for-You Fats

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

For many years, fat got a bad rap as a food substance to avoid.

Fat-free foods were all the rage in the late 1980s when scientists detailed the hazards of excess butter, oil, saturated fat and any foods containing these ingredients.



Today, fat is rightfully acknowledged as an essential component of a healthful diet and as a factor for maintaining good health. But not all fats are created equal. What remains important is the type of fat we choose and the quantity we eat.

Which type is better? We need to select more of the "good" unsaturated fats from oils, nuts, seeds and fish and less saturated fat from butter, meat and other animal-based products. Cut back on baked goods, deep-fried foods and items made with heart-harming trans fat (listed as *partially hydrogenated oil* on ingredients lists).

How much? Aim to keep total fat intake between 20% and 35% of total calories, mostly from unsaturated fat. Try to consume less than 10% of calories from saturated fat. In a 2,000-calorie-a-day diet, that's:

- 45-65 total grams of fat daily — mostly unsaturated.
- No more than 22 grams of saturated fat daily.
- As little trans fat as possible.



Fat intake is related to heart health.

Replacing foods high in saturated and trans fats with less-saturated options can help lower cholesterol levels and reduce the risk of developing heart disease. Try these kitchen strategies:

- Cook and bake with vegetable oils (such as canola, olive, sunflower and peanut) instead of butter, cream, shortening or lard.
- Choose skim milk instead of whole milk or cream.
- Opt for legumes, fish, skinless poultry, nuts, seeds and lean meat instead of fattier cuts of meat.

To late for a flu shot? No, it's not.

If you didn't get a flu shot earlier, it's still OK to get vaccinated any time during flu season. Influenza activity in the U.S. usually peaks around February and continues as late as May. Your protection against flu strains provided in the vaccine starts within one to two weeks and generally lasts at least six to eight months. The CDC recommends a yearly flu vaccine for everyone 6 months of age or older.

By Elizabeth Smoots, MD, EAAFP

Next Month: Make Exercise Fun