

The DASH Diet

Blood pressure is the force of blood against the walls of the arteries. Blood pressure rises and falls during the day. When blood pressure stays elevated over time, it is called high blood pressure or hypertension. High blood pressure is a dangerous thing because it makes the heart work too hard and contributes to atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries). It increases the risk of heart disease and stroke and can cause congestive heart failure, kidney disease, and blindness.

A blood pressure of 140/90 mmHg or higher is considered high. A blood pressure between 120/80 mmHg and 139/89 mmHg is considered prehypertension. It is important to take steps to keep your blood pressure under control.

Research has shown that following a healthy eating plan can both reduce the risk of developing high blood pressure and lower an already elevated blood pressure. For an overall eating plan, consider the DASH eating plan. "DASH" stands for "Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension," a clinical study that tested the effects of nutrients in food on blood pressure. DASH focuses on increasing intake of foods rich in nutrients that are expected to lower blood pressure, mainly potassium, magnesium, and calcium. Study results indicated that elevated blood pressures were reduced by an eating plan that emphasizes fruits, vegetables, and lowfat dairy foods and is low in saturated fat, total fat, and cholesterol. The DASH eating plan includes whole grains, poultry, fish, and nuts and has reduced amounts of fats, red meats, sweets, and sugared beverages.

A second clinical study, called "DASH-Sodium," looked at the effect of a reduced dietary sodium intake on blood pressure as people followed either the DASH eating plan or a typical American diet. Results showed that reducing dietary sodium lowered blood

pressure for both the DASH eating plan and the typical American diet. The biggest blood pressure-lowering benefits were for those eating the DASH eating plan at the lowest sodium level (1,500 milligrams per day). The DASH-Sodium study shows the importance of lowering sodium intake whatever your diet. But for a true winning combination, follow the DASH eating plan and lower your intake of salt and sodium.

References:

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. Retrieved 8/13/2007 from:

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/hbp/hbp/whathbp.htm> .

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Department of Health and Human Services, April, 2006