

Nutrition News

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A COMMUNITY NUTRITION PROGRAMS NEWSLETTER

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Eat Vegetables, Move More: Chronic Disease Prevention by Diet

In May, several health organizations promote the awareness of chronic diseases such as hypertension and osteoporosis in hopes of helping to reduce the incidence of these diseases. These two chronic diseases can be prevented or delayed with a proper diet and physical activity. Large-scale studies across the country have shown that diet is more effective in reducing hypertension than medication.

These studies were called DASH – Dietary Approaches to Studying Hypertension. The first DASH study involved almost 500 adults with one-third of them having high blood pressure. About 50 percent were women and 60 percent were African Americans. It compared three eating plans: a plan that includes foods similar to what many Americans regularly eat; a plan that includes foods similar to what many Americans regularly eat plus more fruits and vegetables; and the DASH eating plan. All three plans included about 3,000 milligrams of sodium daily. None of the plans was vegetarian or used specialty foods.

Results were dramatic. Participants who followed both the plan that included more fruits and vegetables and the DASH eating plan had reduced blood pressure. But the DASH eating plan had the greatest effect, especially for those with high blood pressure. Furthermore, the blood pressure reductions came fast—within two weeks of starting the plan.

The DASH eating plan follows heart-healthy guidelines to limit saturated fat and cholesterol. It focuses on increasing intake of foods rich in nutrients that are expected to lower blood pressure, mainly minerals (like potassium, calcium and magnesium), protein and fiber. It includes nutrient-rich foods so that it meets other nutrient requirements as recommended by the Institute of Medicine. The diet in these studies was high in fresh fruits and vegetables, dairy and whole grains.

Daily Nutrient Goals Used in the DASH Studies (for a 2,100 Calorie Eating Plan)

Total fat calories	27% of
Sodium	2,300 mg*
Saturated fat	6% of calories
Potassium	4,700 mg
Protein calories	18% of
Calcium	1,250 mg
Carbohydrate	55% of calories
Magnesium	500 mg
Cholesterol	150 mg
Fiber	30 g

** 1,500 mg sodium was a lower goal tested and found to be even better for lowering blood pressure. It was particularly effective for middle-age and older individuals, African Americans and those who already had high blood pressure.*

g = grams; mg = milligrams



Specifically the DASH diet plan includes:

Type of food	Number of servings for 1,600 – 3,100 Calorie diets	Servings on a 2,000 Calorie diet
Grains and grain products (include at least 3 whole grain foods each day)	6 - 12	7 - 8
Fruits	4 - 6	4 - 5
Vegetables	4 - 6	4 - 5
Low fat or nonfat dairy foods	2 - 4	2 - 3
Lean meats, fish, poultry	1.5 - 2.5	2 or less
Nuts, seeds and legumes	3 - 6 per week	4 - 5 per week
Fats and sweets	2 - 4	limited

In addition to being recommended by your physician, DASH is also recommended by:

- The National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute
- The American Heart Association
- The 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans
- Centers for Disease Control

Another important aspect of preventing these and other chronic diseases is physical activity. May is a Physical Fitness and Sports Month. In Louisiana this is a perfect month for getting involved in

outdoor activities before it gets too hot and humid. If you have not exercised regularly before, think about starting now. Don't keep putting it off till the distant future. Getting physical can help in reducing blood pressure and it can help maintain strong bones. Any kind of physical activity requiring moving the body can help in preserving and building bone mass and this is particularly important for postmenopausal women and teenagers. Think about walking, swimming, bicycling or jogging. Taking part in outdoor activities such as hiking or going on walking trails around Louisiana can bring big rewards. It can also reduce stress.

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