



DASH diet no fad, just healthful eating

A friend of mine is losing weight on something called the DASH diet. Is it a fad?

Actually, the DASH diet is a well-researched healthy eating plan. But its focus isn't on weight loss — it's on reducing high blood pressure.

DASH, or Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension, was introduced in 1997 after studies funded by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute showed how effective it was. Researchers say that following the plan can lower blood pressure within two weeks. The diet often has an effect as strong as medication (but, of course, anyone on medication for hypertension should consult with their doctor before making any changes).

The focus of DASH is to incorporate more fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy foods into everyday eating, and reduce fat (especially saturated fat) and cholesterol intake. Fish, poultry and nuts are primary choices for protein, with less red meat and sugar than most Americans consume. DASH is also rich in potassium, calcium and magnesium, which help regulate blood pressure.

Following a plan like this tends to substitute foods lower in calories for the higher-calorie foods that are abundant in a typical American diet. Eating an apple instead of a bag of potato chips, for example, increases your fruit intake — one of the primary goals of DASH — and, at the same time, lowers your total calories. That's good news for the two-thirds

of American adults who are obese or overweight.

Making such substitutions also can assist in reducing sodium intake. Foods recommended by DASH, especially fresh fruits and vegetables, are often naturally lower in sodium than most processed foods. But DASH also gives tips to reduce sodium even more. Just looking at Nutrition Facts labels is key: Breakfast cereal, for example, can have as little as 0 or as much as 360 milligrams of sodium per serving. Choosing foods with less sodium can help you reduce intake to the DASH-recommended 2,300 milligrams a day — or even lower, to 1,500 milligrams, to help reduce blood pressure even more. Both levels are significantly less than the typical 3,300-4,200 milligrams a day consumed by the average American.

A 64-page booklet that explains DASH is available as a free download at <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/hbp/dash/>, or a single copy can be ordered for \$3.50 plus shipping. It includes meal plans, recipes and ideas for increasing physical activity, as well as variations of the plan for different calorie levels.

The bottom line? DASH is far from a fad diet. It's an eating plan that can significantly reduce health risks, and help you lose weight along the way.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu.



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