



Healthy Families. Healthy Community.

DIET AND EXERCISE FOR PEOPLE WITH HYPERTENSION

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Hypertension affects approximately 50 million people in the United States. Many individuals are unaware that they have hypertension. Hypertension is elevated blood pressure. A normal blood pressure is considered below 120/80 mmHg. Pre-hypertension is a blood pressure between 120/80mmHg and 140/90 mmHg. Hypertension is when the blood pressure is at or above 140/90mmHg. If left untreated, hypertension can lead to serious medical complications, such as heart attack, stroke, kidney failure, and enlarged heart. To avoid serious complications, it is important to get regular blood pressure checks and take blood pressure medications if it is found that you do have hypertension. Risk factors for hypertension are age over 60, male sex, race, heredity, obesity, inactive lifestyle, heavy alcohol consumption, and for some, birth control pills.

Along with medication, diet and exercise are important in the treatment of hypertension. Lifestyle changes that may reduce, or even alleviate, hypertension include reducing salt and fat intake, losing weight, regular exercise, quitting smoking, reducing alcohol consumption, and managing stress. A helpful diet to follow is one called the DASH diet. **DASH** stands for Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension. This diet was part of a study done to look at the effects of eating patterns on blood pressure. The DASH diet is a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy foods, and is low in saturated fat, total fat, and cholesterol. This diet, which is a potassium rich diet, was shown to significantly reduce blood pressure. It is believed that a diet that is low in salt but high in potassium helps blood vessels dilate and therefore decrease blood pressure.

Some examples of suggested foods are as follows:

- Grains or grain products, such as whole wheat bread, pita bread, brown rice, whole grain cereals, oatmeal, and air-popped popcorn.
- Vegetables, such as tomatoes, carrots, squash, broccoli, greens(collard, kale, and spinach), artichokes, turnips, beans (including lima and green beans), sweet potatoes, and turnips.
- Fruits, such as bananas, apricots, dates, raisins, peaches, melons, citrus, mangoes, peaches, tangerines, pineapples, and dried fruits.
- Low-fat or fat-free dairy foods, such as skim or 1% milk, fat-free buttermilk, fat-free yogurt, and fat-free or low fat cheese.
- Nuts, seeds, and dry beans: kidney, lentil, black, peas, almonds, walnuts, mixed nuts, filberts, and sunflower seeds.
- Meats, poultry, and fish should be lean cuts and trim away visible fat.
- Fats and oils should consist of soft margarine (lower in trans fatty acids), low fat mayonnaise and salad dressing, and vegetable oils consisting of olive, corn, canola, or safflower.

Choose foods that are low in salt, avoiding pickled, smoked, cured, and processed foods. Do not add salt to your foods.