

## DASH to Lower Blood Pressure

While I am away on maternity leave, my newsletters will still be published monthly in the form of "Best of Jessica's Nutrition Notes." I am including past articles that have been popular and are also relevant to the themes of pregnancy and parenthood. I've heard that parenthood is stressful enough to raise blood pressure, so diet and lifestyle tips for lowering your blood pressure seem to be particularly appropriate right now. Whether you're a new parent, one of the 30% of Americans who have hypertension (high blood pressure), or one of the 30% with pre-hypertension (which means you're on your way to having high blood pressure), I hope that you will find this newsletter to be a good resource for improving your health.

High blood pressure is dubbed the "silent killer" because you can't "feel" it—not even if you have severely high blood pressure. Unbeknownst to you, this sneaky condition could be hard at work making your heart work harder, hardening your arteries, damaging your kidneys and possibly even causing your brain to hemorrhage. Hypertension increases the likelihood of having a stroke or heart attack, heart failure, kidney disease and even blindness. Blood pressure that is merely elevated increases the risk of having a heart attack or developing cardiovascular disease (hypertension is the most common form of cardiovascular disease). If you have a pre-existing condition, such as diabetes or high cholesterol, or are overweight or drink more than two alcoholic



beverages a day, then you have a much higher risk of developing hypertension.

Are you curious to know if you're at risk? The only way to know your numbers is to have your pressure tested by a doctor or nurse. An optimal reading is below 120/80 mmHg. Check the box on this page to see where

your reading falls. To determine your category, go with the number that fits into the higher category. For instance, if your reading is 139/80, then you are in the high-normal category. A reading in the normal or high-normal category is considered pre-hypertensive.

### Blood Pressure Reading Categories

Optimal	Below 120/80
Normal	Between 120–129/80–84
High-Normal	Between 130–139/85–89
Hypertension	Above 140/90



Gelson's registered dietitian, Jessica Siegel, has a Masters in Public Health. However, she is not a doctor and her nutritional recommendations are not tailored to specific health problems. Consult your physician before beginning any nutritional program. To contact Jessica, please call her at 1-800-GELSONS.

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A reading that is at or greater than 120/80 is a sign that you need to make some lifestyle changes immediately. Hypertension can be controlled with diet and lifestyle modifications and, in some cases, with medication. However, medication is a last resort and should only be used to treat hypertension, not pre-hypertension. A reading below 120/80 doesn't mean you shouldn't continue reading this article, though. Blood pressure increases with age and, though we can't stop aging, we can take measures to prevent our blood pressure from creeping upwards.



If your blood pressure is above the optimal range, or if it is optimal and you want it to stay that way, here's what you need to do:

✓ **Lose weight if you're overweight or weigh more than you used to.**

Carrying extra weight raises your blood pressure and losing even a little bit of that weight will help to lower it. The more weight you lose and keep off, the more you will reduce your blood pressure.

✓ **Get physically active—even 30 minutes of moderate activity each day can do the trick.**

In early 2006, the American Heart Association revised its lifestyle recommendations for lowering blood pressure. Weight loss achieved with the aid of a high level of physical activity is now its number one recommendation. Aside from lowering blood pressure, exercise is a crucial part of weight loss and maintenance. Regular exercise is important for everyone, not just people with elevated blood pressure, since it helps to prevent blood pressure from rising.

✓ **Stop smoking if you still smoke.**

Smoking not only raises your blood pressure, it also increases your risks for other cardiovascular diseases and strokes.

✓ **Take up a relaxation technique.**

Breathing exercises, meditation, yoga (which is also exercise) and biofeedback are all effective ways to let go of some stress and lower your blood pressure. Stress is associated with elevated blood pressure and recent studies have shown that relaxation techniques can mitigate some stress and, therefore, lower blood pressure.

✓ **Discontinue or minimize the use of caffeine, which is associated with a short term rise in blood pressure (especially if it is consumed irregularly).**

Coffee, tea, soda and energy drinks do not cause high blood pressure, per se, but they may temporarily raise blood pressure in people who drink it infrequently. If you do use caffeine, try to drink a small amount of green tea or drip coffee daily.

✓ **Cut your sodium intake down to no more than 1,500 milligrams a day.**

Avoid salty foods such as processed foods, lunch meats and cured meats, frozen prepared foods, canned foods and foods that are prepared in most restaurants. When you do buy processed and packaged food, read the Nutrition Facts on the food labels and compare labels on similar products to help yourself make the best choice. When using

canned foods, lower the sodium content further by rinsing and draining them first. Learn to use fresh herbs, dried salt-free spices, pepper and lemon juice instead of salt when cooking. Your food will taste a little bland for about three weeks because that's how long it takes for your taste buds to turn over, but after that, your new taste

lower blood pressure. If followed closely, it can also help you reach your weight goals. All of the components of the diet are important, but the two that carry the most weight (no pun intended) are the serving recommendations for produce and nonfat and low-fat dairy products. These two types of foods contain the minerals potassium, calcium and magnesium, while also

DASH Diet Guidelines			
Food Group	Daily Servings for a 2,000 Calorie Diet	Daily Servings for a 1,600 Calorie Diet	Serving Size Examples
Whole Grains	7-8	5	½ cup cooked brown rice, barley, quinoa, whole-wheat pasta or oats, 1 slice whole-grain bread, 1 ounce (28g) whole-grain muesli, granola or dry cereal
Vegetables	4-5	3-4	1 cup raw leafy greens, ½ cup whole, chopped, or cooked vegetables, 6 ounces low-sodium vegetable juice
Fruits	4-5	4	1 medium whole fruit, ½ cup cut, cooked, or canned fruit, 4 ounces fruit juice, ¼ cup dried fruit
Low-fat & Nonfat Dairy Products	2-3	2-3	1 cup non- or low-fat yogurt, 8 ounces non- or low-fat milk, 1½ ounces low-fat cheese
Fish, Poultry & Meats	2 or less	1½ or less	3 ounces cooked salmon or other fish, skinless chicken or turkey breast, lean beef sirloin, round, flank or filet, 3 eggs or 6 egg whites
Nuts, Seeds & Dry Beans	4-5 per week	4-5 per week	⅓ cup or 1½ ounces unsalted walnuts, almonds, pecans or cashews, ½ cup cooked dry lentil, kidney, soy or other beans (drained and rinsed), 2 tablespoons sunflower or other seeds, 2 tablespoons nut butter
Fats & Oils	2-3	2	1 teaspoon olive oil, canola oil or butter, 1 tablespoon salad dressing or low-fat mayonnaise, 2 tablespoons low-fat salad dressing
Sweets	5 per week	1 per week	1 tablespoon sugar, syrup, jam, ½ ounce dark chocolate or hard candy, 8 ounces lemonade or fruit punch, ½ cup sorbet

buds will help you taste the varied and subtle flavors in your food. Please be patient with the new flavor profile of your food; you will be rewarded. Lowering salt intake not only lowers blood pressure, it also reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease, stroke death and coronary death. Researchers are finding that 1,500 milligrams is an optimal upper limit for yielding the best blood pressure lowering results. Individuals older than 70 should have an upper limit of 1,200 milligrams of sodium a day.

**✓ Follow the DASH Diet eating plan to really help shake down your blood pressure.** The DASH Diet is proven to help people reach their goals because it is full of specific types of foods that help to

being naturally low in sodium. The American Heart Association advises eating eight to ten servings of fruits and vegetables daily as part of the DASH Diet in order to maximize potassium intake. ALL produce contains potassium, not just bananas, so make sure that you eat a variety of fruit and vegetables each day. Two to three servings of nonfat milk and yogurt, as well as low-fat cheese, are recommended because they are rich sources of calcium and magnesium. See the DASH Diet general eating guidelines on this page.

This eating plan is intended to be a lifestyle, not a diet. It is rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy products, moderate in protein, low in total fat, trans fat, saturated fat and cholesterol and high in fiber. The



**Cooking Tip:** Instead of salt, add flavor to meals with fresh herbs, dried salt-free spices, pepper and lemon juice.

guidelines I have given you are based on 2,000 and 1,600 calorie diets, but you can adjust the grain, vegetable, fruit and fat servings up for more calories or down for fewer calories depending on your calorie needs. Notice that alcohol is not included in the calorie counts in the eating guidelines, since it has been shown to raise blood pressure and is not recommended as part of this plan. Use my DASH Diet Daily Record Worksheet on the back of this newsletter to help you figure out how closely you are adhering to the DASH Diet. Make sure your meals are balanced with whole grains, protein and vegetables or fruit so you don't get hungry and your blood sugar stays steady throughout the day.

Heart disease is the number one killer of both women and men. If you want to stay healthy, lower your disease risk and live longer, then you have to know your risk factors. Even if hypertension is not an issue for you, keep in mind that this eating plan is not just for lowering blood pressure, it's also just plain healthy.

# DASH Diet Worksheet

Use this worksheet to record what you eat and compare it to the DASH Diet Guidelines on the previous page to see if you are eating the correct number of food group servings to lower your blood pressure.

Date _____ Physical Activity Minutes _____	Amount (Serving Size)	Sodium (mg)	Whole Grains	Veggies	Fruits	Dairy Products	Fish, Poultry & Meats	Nuts, Seeds & Dry Beans	Fats & Oils	Sweets
Breakfast _____ _____ _____ _____										
Mid-Morning Snack _____ _____										
Lunch _____ _____ _____ _____ _____										
Afternoon Snack _____ _____										
Dinner _____ _____ _____ _____ _____										
Day's Total										

BON APPETIT!



If you have any questions, please feel free to call Jessica at 1-800-GELSONS (435-7667) or visit our website [www.gelsons.com](http://www.gelsons.com) for more nutrition information and store locations.