

Getting Started on DASH

It's easy to adopt the DASH eating plan. Even small changes made gradually lead to significant benefits. Follow these steps to begin a healthy lifestyle for a lifetime.



kale



kidney beans



blackberries



potato



salmon

1 Assess where you are now.

The DASH eating plan requires no special foods and has no hard-to-follow recipes. One way to begin is by using the free, interactive, online [Body Weight Planner \(niddk.nih.gov/bwp\)](https://niddk.nih.gov/bwp) to find out how many calories you need per day to maintain or reach your goal weight. Then fill in the [What's on Your Plate?](#) worksheet for a few days and see how your current food habits compare with the DASH plan. This will help you see what changes you need to make.

2 Discuss medication with your doctor.

If you take medication to control high blood pressure or cholesterol, you should not stop using it. Follow the DASH eating plan and talk with your doctor about your medication treatment as part of an overall plan for wellness.

3 Make DASH a part of your healthy life.

The DASH eating plan along with other lifestyle changes can help you control your blood pressure and lower blood cholesterol. Important lifestyle recommendations include: achieve and maintain a healthy weight, get regular physical activity, and, if you drink alcohol, do so in moderation (up to one drink per day for women and up to two drinks per day for men).

4 DASH is for everyone in the family.

Start with the meal plans in [A Week With the DASH Eating Plan](#) if you want to follow the menus similar to those used in the DASH trial—then make up your own using your favorite foods. In fact, your entire family can eat meals using the DASH eating plan because it can be adapted to meet varied nutritional needs, food preferences, and dietary requirements.

5 Don't worry.

Remember that on some days the foods you eat may add up to more than the recommended servings from one food group and less from another. Or, you may have too much sodium on a particular day. Just try your best to keep the average of several days close to the DASH eating plan and the sodium level recommended for you.