

Implementing a Low Sodium DASH Diet: Practical Tips for Counseling Patients

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How can we help patients adopt a low-sodium DASH diet to improve blood pressure (BP) control?

Following the low-sodium version of the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet can reduce systolic blood pressure in hypertensive patients by about 11 mmHg^{*1}; potentially enough to avoid an additional BP medication. The DASH diet emphasizes consumption of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy, and heart healthy fats, which differs from the typical American diet that tends to be higher in processed, sugary, and high sodium foods (Figure 1).

Helping patients understand, start, and stick with a lower sodium intake on the DASH diet can be challenging. Cardi-OH has developed a “plate” infographic to help providers counsel patients on the DASH diet. Refer patients to the National Institutes of Health’s **What’s On Your Plate?** checklists, available in four calorie ranges, for the DASH eating plan.² Consider the following practical tips when counseling patients.

Make smart swaps

Exchange frequently consumed processed foods for healthier, accessible options. A referral to a registered dietitian may help.

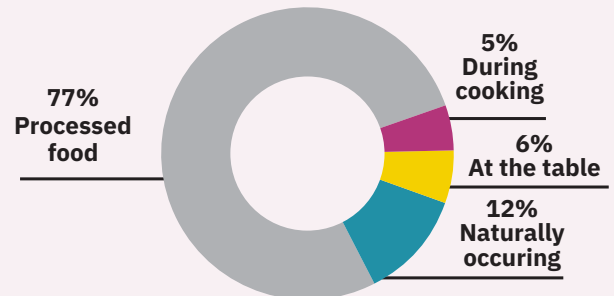
Trade this...	For this
sodas, juices, sweet tea, sports drinks	water, unsweetened seltzer, unsweetened tea, low-fat milk
sugary cereal, breakfast pastries	whole-grain oatmeal, unsweetened yogurt or plain Greek yogurt with fresh berries
white rice, pasta	lentils, black beans, quinoa, “riced” sweet potato, cauliflower, cabbage
bacon, sausage, deli meat	grilled fish, eggs, tofu, hummus
chips, packaged snacks	carrots, almonds, walnuts, cucumbers, peppers, tomatoes
salt, salty seasonings	herbs, lemon, pepper, salt-free spice mixes

* BP reduction of 5.3 mmHg-20.8 mmHg, with greater reductions seen at higher baseline BPs.

References

- Juraschek SP, Miller III ER, Weaver CM, Appel LJ. Effects of sodium reduction and the DASH diet in relation to baseline blood pressure. *J Am Coll Cardiol.* 2017;70(23):2841-2848. doi:10.1016/j.jacc.2017.10.011.
- National Institutes of Health. DASH Eating Plan. <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/dash-eating-plan>. Updated January 10, 2025. Accessed March 23, 2025.

Figure 1. Typical Sources of Dietary Sodium in the American Diet



Track your daily sodium intake and do not exceed 1,500 mg, or about 3/4 of a teaspoon of salt

Read labels

- Remember that sodium is found in beverages, too, including sports drinks and sodas
- Look at serving sizes; consuming two servings means twice the amount of sodium listed on the label
- Choose foods with **5% or less** of the Daily Value of sodium per serving
- Foods labeled “reduced” sodium or “light” sodium can be misleading; they are often still high in salt

Nutrition Facts	
8 servings per container	
Serving size 2/3 cup (55g)	
Amount per serving	
Calories	230
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 8g	10%
Saturated Fat 1g	5%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 100mg	4%
Total Carbohydrate 37g	13%

Look for foods labeled:

low sodium:
less than 140 mg sodium per serving

sodium free:
less than 5 mg sodium per serving

no salt added

- Prepare most meals at home to have greater control of sodium intake

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