

● A PATIENT GUIDE FROM YOUR CARDIOLOGIST

The DASH Diet

& Your Blood Pressure

A simple, evidence-based way of eating, designed to lower high blood pressure and protect your heart — built from everyday food, with less salt and more flavour.



01 Why this guide matters to you

High blood pressure is the single biggest treatable cause of heart attacks and strokes — and the way you eat can lower it almost as effectively as a tablet. The **DASH diet** (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) was designed by doctors for exactly this purpose, and it has the strongest evidence of any eating pattern for bringing blood pressure down. It isn't a fad or a crash diet. It's a generous, balanced way of eating built around vegetables, fruit, wholegrains, low-fat dairy, beans, nuts and lean protein — with less salt.

“Patients are often surprised that food can affect their blood pressure as much as it does. With DASH the goal isn't deprivation, its addition. I encourage you to eat more vegetables, fruit and low-fat dairy, and to ease off the salt. The numbers usually follow.”

— DR. RAVI ASSOMULL, CONSULTANT CARDIOLOGIST

The numbers you should know

~11 mmHg

LOWER SYSTOLIC BLOOD
PRESSURE IN PEOPLE WITH
HYPERTENSION

~11.5 mmHg

LOWER WITH LOW-SALT DASH VS
A HIGH-SALT DIET

871

ADULTS IN THE TWO LANDMARK
DASH TRIALS

Sources: DASH trial (New England Journal of Medicine, 1997); DASH-Sodium trial (New England Journal of Medicine, 2001).

What you'll get from this guide

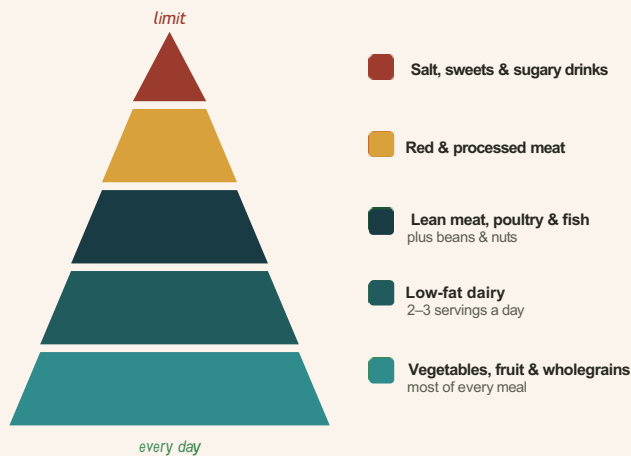
- An explanation of what the DASH diet actually is, and the food groups that do most of the work for your blood pressure.
- A clear daily plate and serving guide, plus a straight-talking section on salt — where it hides and how to cut it without losing flavour.
- A fully worked example day showing where the calories come from, plus an affordable **7-day starter plan** of meals that take little time to make.
- Simple swaps, a shopping steer and answers to the questions patients ask me most.

★ HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

Read it once from cover to cover, then keep the plate guide and 7-day plan on your fridge. You don't need to be perfect — steady, mostly DASH eating with less salt is what brings your blood pressure down and keeps it there over months and years.

02 What is the DASH diet?

It isn't a strict set of rules — it's a **pattern**. Think of food in tiers: the things you eat most are vegetables, fruit and wholegrains; low-fat dairy, beans, fish and lean meat feature daily in modest amounts; salt, red meat and sweets are kept to a minimum. Nothing is completely forbidden. The shape of the week matters more than any single meal.



The DASH pyramid — eat most from the wide base.

The core foods

- **Vegetables & fruit** at almost every meal — fresh or frozen.
- **Wholegrains** — oats, wholewheat bread & pasta, brown rice.
- **Low-fat dairy** — milk, plain yoghurt, modest cheese.
- **Beans, lentils & chickpeas** several times a week.
- **Nuts & seeds** — a small, unsalted handful.
- **Lean protein** — fish, skinless poultry, eggs.
- **Healthy oils** — olive or rapeseed, in moderation.
- **Herbs, garlic, lemon & spices** in place of salt.

WHAT YOU'LL NATURALLY EAT LESS OF

Because the plate fills up with vegetables, fruit, wholegrains and low-fat dairy, there's simply less room for the things that raise blood pressure — salt and salty processed food, red and processed meat, sugary drinks and snacks, and ultra-processed ready meals. You cut back without feeling deprived.

⚠ IT'S A PATTERN, NOT A SINGLE “SUPERFOOD”

No one ingredient does the work. The benefit comes from the whole way of eating — plenty of plants, wholegrains and low-fat dairy, with much less salt — eaten consistently, in place of a typical processed Western diet.



03 Why it protects your heart

The DASH diet doesn't work through one magic mechanism — it nudges several of the things that drive heart disease in the right direction at once, starting with blood pressure, and reaching cholesterol, blood sugar and weight. By lowering the pressure inside your arteries, it eases the strain on your heart, brain and kidneys day after day.



Lower pressure, healthier arteries

The gold lines are your coronary arteries — the vessels that feed the heart muscle. When blood pressure is high, it batters their lining and speeds the build-up of fatty plaque (in red). By bringing pressure down, the DASH diet keeps those vessels smoother and more flexible — meaning fewer of the blockages behind angina, heart attacks, strokes and heart failure.

The four main ways it helps



1. Lower blood pressure

Potassium, magnesium and calcium from vegetables, fruit and low-fat dairy help relax and widen blood vessels, easing the pressure inside.



2. Less salt, less strain

Cutting sodium reduces the fluid your body holds onto, which directly lowers the pressure your arteries have to withstand.



3. Better cholesterol & weight

Wholegrains, fruit, veg and low-fat dairy with less saturated fat lower harmful LDL and make a healthy weight easier to keep.



4. Steadier blood sugar

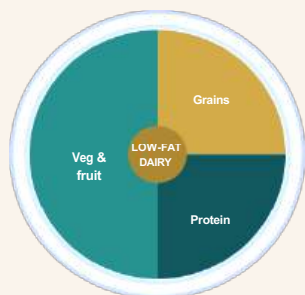
Fibre from wholegrains, beans and vegetables slows the rise in blood sugar, easing the path to type-2 diabetes — itself a major risk to arteries.

♥ THE GOOD NEWS

In the **DASH trial**, adults with high blood pressure who followed the diet lowered their systolic pressure by about **11 mmHg** — and their diastolic by around 5.5 mmHg — in just a few weeks, with no medication. In the **DASH-Sodium trial**, combining the diet with a low-salt intake lowered systolic pressure by up to **11.5 mmHg** compared with a typical high-salt diet. To put that in context, even a 5 mmHg fall in systolic pressure meaningfully cuts the risk of stroke and heart attack.

04 What a day looks like

You don't have to weigh anything. The simplest guide is your plate: make **half** vegetables and fruit, **a quarter** wholegrains, and **a quarter** lean protein — fish, poultry, beans or eggs — with low-fat dairy alongside and just a little healthy oil.



Half plants · ¼ grains
· ¼ protein

Daily & weekly servings

A realistic target on a ~2,000 kcal day — a “serving” is roughly a handful or a small cupped portion.

Vegetables	4–5 a day	Fill half your plate — fresh or frozen, more colour is better
Fruit	4–5 a day	Whole fruit; berries, apples, citrus, banana, melon
Wholegrains	6–8 a day	Oats, wholewheat bread & pasta, brown rice, bulgur
Low-fat & fat-free dairy	2–3 a day	Milk, plain yoghurt, modest amounts of cheese
Lean meat, poultry & fish	≤ 170 g a day	Fish (oily twice a week), skinless poultry — not red meat
Beans, lentils & pulses	4–5 a week	Tinned or dried chickpeas, lentils, butter beans
Nuts & seeds	4–5 a week	A small handful — unsalted almonds, walnuts, mixed
Fats & oils	2–3 a day	Olive or rapeseed oil; soft spreads in place of butter
Sweets & added sugar	≤ 5 a week	Fresh fruit is the everyday dessert; sweets now and then
Salt	under 6 g a day	About one level teaspoon — less is better still

◆ TO DRINK

Water is your main drink, with low-fat milk counting toward your dairy. If you drink alcohol, keep it to **no more than 14 units a week** spread over several days, with alcohol-free days — too much alcohol pushes blood pressure up.

05 A straight word on salt

Salt is the part of DASH that does the most for your blood pressure — and the part most people get wrong. The catch is that most of our salt isn't added at the table; it's already baked into everyday processed food. The good news is that taste buds adjust within a couple of weeks, and food soon tastes *better*, not blander.

Under 6 g

RECOMMENDED MAXIMUM SALT A DAY — ABOUT ONE TEASPOON

~3 in 4

GRAMS OF OUR SALT ALREADY HIDDEN IN PROCESSED FOOD

1,500 mg

SODIUM LEVEL THAT LOWERED BP MOST IN DASH-SODIUM

UK recommendation (NHS): no more than 6 g of salt a day for adults. The lower sodium target (1.5 g) reflects the DASH-Sodium trial.

How to cut salt without losing flavour

- **Cook from scratch** when you can, and taste before you reach for the cellar — you usually won't need it.
- **Flavour boldly instead:** garlic, lemon, herbs, spices, chilli, black pepper and a splash of vinegar.
- **Read the label:** more than 1.5 g salt (0.6 g sodium) per 100 g is high; under 0.3 g is low. Choose the greens and ambers.
- **Watch the hidden sources:** bread, stock cubes, sauces, soy sauce, cured and processed meats, and cheese.
- **Drain and rinse** tinned beans and vegetables to wash off some of the salt.

★ POTASSIUM — THE OTHER HALF OF THE STORY

Vegetables, fruit, beans and low-fat dairy are rich in potassium, which works against sodium to relax blood vessels. Eating more of these is as important as eating less salt.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

06 One DASH day, costed

A real day's eating of about **2,000 kcal** — naturally rich in vegetables, fruit, wholegrains and low-fat dairy, and low in salt. Use it as a template and adjust portions to your own appetite and needs.

Breakfast

≈ 430 kcal

40 g porridge oats	150
200 ml semi-skimmed milk	95
1 medium banana, sliced	95
15 g walnuts & mixed seeds	90

Lunch

≈ 525 kcal

60 g wholegrain wrap	180
100 g cooked chickpeas	165
Large salad — leaves, tomato, cucumber, pepper, carrot	60
1 tbsp olive oil + lemon dressing	120

Dinner

≈ 630 kcal

130 g baked salmon, lemon & herbs	270
180 g cooked brown rice	230
200 g steamed broccoli, carrots & courgette	90
1 tsp olive oil on the vegetables	40

Snacks & dessert

≈ 415 kcal

150 g low-fat plain yoghurt	90
80 g mixed berries	40
1 apple	70
20 g unsalted almonds	120
200 ml milk (in tea/coffee through the day)	95

Daily total

≈ 2,000 kcal

Calorie figures are approximate and rounded, for guidance only. With no added salt and low-salt choices, this day comes in under ~3 g salt and provides ~3 servings of low-fat dairy, 5 of vegetables and fruit, plenty of wholegrains, and a handful of unsalted nuts.

A QUICK WORD ON CALORIES

Most adults need around **2,000 kcal** (women) or **2,500 kcal** (men) a day; the menus here sit near 2,000. To lose a little weight, aim for about 500 kcal a day below your need — losing extra weight lowers blood pressure further.

07 Your 7-day DASH plate

A week of simple, affordable meals — most take under 25 minutes, and all are low in salt. Swap proteins or vegetables for what's in season, on offer, or already in your fridge. Each day lands around **2,000 kcal**.

DAY	BREAKFAST	LUNCH	DINNER
Monday	Porridge with milk, banana & walnuts	Chickpea & roasted vegetable wholegrain wrap	Baked salmon, brown rice & steamed greens
Tuesday	Plain yoghurt with berries, oats & seeds	Lentil soup (no added salt) with wholegrain bread	Grilled chicken, sweet potato & big mixed salad
Wednesday	Wholegrain toast, smashed avocado & poached egg	Tuna, white bean & rocket salad with olive oil	Vegetable & chickpea curry with brown rice
Thursday	Overnight oats with milk, chia, almonds & pear	Jacket potato with low-fat yoghurt slaw & salad	Grilled mackerel, new potatoes & roasted veg
Friday	Tomato & herb omelette with wholegrain toast	Mixed bean & roasted pepper salad	Wholewheat pasta with tomato, garlic & vegetables
Saturday	Greek yoghurt with mixed berries, oats & nut butter	Hummus, wholegrain pitta & a big crunchy salad	Roast chicken with ratatouille & brown rice
Sunday	Porridge with milk, grated apple & cinnamon	Sardines on wholegrain toast with tomato salad	Slow-cooked white bean & vegetable stew with bread

For families & tight budgets

- **Frozen is your friend.** Frozen veg, fruit and fish are just as nutritious as fresh — often cheaper, and they don't spoil.
- **Tins are the backbone.** No-added-salt beans, lentils and tomatoes are cheap, keep for months, and build dozens of meals.
- **Batch-cook once, eat three times.** A pot of soup, curry or stew on Sunday becomes lunch and a midweek dinner.
- **Assembly beats cooking on tired nights.** Wholegrain pitta + tinned beans + bagged salad + olive oil is a complete dinner in minutes.



08 Simple swaps to get started

You don't need to change everything at once. Start with one or two of these one-for-one swaps — each nudges your blood pressure, cholesterol or weight in the right direction, and they quickly become habit.

SWAP OUT

Salt at the table

SWAP IN

Garlic, lemon, herbs & spices

SWAP OUT

Crisps & salty snacks

SWAP IN

Unsalted nuts & fresh fruit

SWAP OUT

Red & processed meat

SWAP IN

Fish, poultry or pulses

SWAP OUT

Stock cubes & gravy granules

SWAP IN

Low-salt stock & fresh herbs

SWAP OUT

White bread & rice

SWAP IN

Wholegrain & brown

SWAP OUT

Full-fat dairy

SWAP IN

Low-fat / fat-free dairy

SWAP OUT

Sugary & fizzy drinks

SWAP IN

Water, milk or no-sugar

SWAP OUT

Ready meals & jarred sauces

SWAP IN

Home-cooked from scratch

Shop like a DASH cook

- Build the trolley from the **edges** — produce, fish counter, dairy — before the aisles.
- Keep a stocked cupboard: **oats, wholegrains, no-added-salt tinned beans & tomatoes, unsalted nuts.**
- Check the salt on the label — aim for the **green and amber** traffic lights, not red
- Buy vegetables and fruit **frozen** as well as fresh, so you never run out.



START WITH JUST ONE

If a week of changes feels like too much, change one thing: leave the salt cellar in the cupboard and add a portion of vegetables to your evening meal. Build from there.

09 What patients ask me most

Q. Is DASH only for people with high blood pressure?

No. It was designed to lower blood pressure, but it lowers it even in people in the normal range — and it's a genuinely healthy, balanced way for the whole family to eat. You don't need a diagnosis to benefit.

Q. Do I have to give up salt completely?

No — aim for under 6 g a day (about a teaspoon), and ideally a little less. Most of the gain comes from cutting hidden salt in processed food and cooking with herbs and spices, not from a totally salt-free diet.

Q. Are “low sodium” salt substitutes a good idea?

They can help, as they replace some sodium with potassium. But if you have kidney disease or take certain blood-pressure tablets, too much potassium can be harmful — so check with your clinician before using them.

Q. Isn't dairy bad for blood pressure or cholesterol?

Low-fat dairy is a core part of DASH — it provides calcium, potassium and protein that help lower blood pressure. The key is choosing low-fat or fat-free versions to keep saturated fat down.

Q. How quickly will my blood pressure improve?

Often within about two weeks, with the full effect over a few weeks of consistent eating. The biggest, most lasting drops come from sticking with it and keeping salt low for the long term.

Q. I'm on blood-pressure tablets — does diet still matter?

Yes, enormously. Diet and medication work together, and eating well may allow your doctor to use a lower dose over time. Never stop or change your tablets on your own — review any changes with your clinician.

⚠ IMPORTANT IF YOU HAVE KIDNEY DISEASE OR TAKE CERTAIN BP MEDICINES

The DASH diet is deliberately high in potassium. If you have chronic kidney disease, or take potassium-sparing diuretics, ACE inhibitors or ARBs, too much potassium can be unsafe — check with your clinician before greatly increasing potassium-rich foods or using potassium-based salt substitutes.

10 Five things to take away

If you remember nothing else, remember these five. Pin them to the fridge and share them with whoever shops and cooks in your home.

1 It's the best-proven diet for blood pressure

Around 11 mmHg lower systolic pressure in people with hypertension — and more still when combined with a low-salt intake. Strong, consistent evidence.

2 Eat the rainbow, plus low-fat dairy

Vegetables, fruit, wholegrains, low-fat dairy, beans, nuts and lean protein. Crowd out the processed food by filling up on the good stuff.

3 Cut the salt

Aim for under 6 g a day. Cook from scratch, dodge hidden salt in processed food, and flavour with herbs and spices, not the cellar.

4 Mind your potassium, calcium & magnesium

These minerals from plants and low-fat dairy work alongside less sodium to relax your arteries and bring pressure down.

5 Consistency, not perfection

Mostly-DASH, most days, for months — that's what changes your blood pressure. It works alongside your medication, and it is never too late to start.

⚠ IMPORTANT — PLEASE READ

This booklet is general health information and is not a substitute for personalised medical advice. Decisions about your medication, diet and treatment should be made together with your GP, cardiologist or a registered dietitian — especially if you take blood-pressure or diabetes medication, potassium-sparing diuretics, ACE inhibitors or ARBs, or have kidney disease. Do not stop or change prescribed medication on your own. If you experience chest pain, breathlessness, palpitations or sudden weakness, seek medical help immediately.

