

Health and Wellness by Kim Dumont

Simple Diabetic & Hypertension Meal Plan

Diabetes can increase your risk of heart disease and stroke. It's crucial to control risk factors such as obesity, elevated cholesterol levels and hypertension (high blood pressure). The American Diabetes Association (ADA) says that as many as two out of three diabetics have hypertension and that because of the increased risk of heart disease, people with diabetes should work to keep blood pressure levels below 130/80 mmHG.

Hypertension and Diabetes High blood pressure, or hypertension, forces your heart to work harder to pump blood throughout your body. According to the ADA, when your heart works harder, your risk for diabetic complications increases. Although there are many causes of hypertension, a high-sodium (salt) diet is most often to blame. Sodium attracts water and excess sodium increases blood volume -- that's what increases the pressure in your circulatory system. Following a low-sodium diet can lower blood pressure in as little as 14 days.

Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services developed the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension, or "DASH", diet to lower blood pressure with a well-balanced nutrient-dense eating plan. Sodium intake is limited to 1,500 mg per day; carbohydrates make up 55 percent of calories, 18 percent come from protein and 27 percent from fat. Saturated fat and dietary cholesterol are very limited, which helps control "bad" LDL cholesterol levels, another risk factor for cardiovascular disease. In essence, people following this diet should be consuming between 44 and 65 percent of calories from carbohydrates, between 12 and 20 percent from protein and between 25 and 35 percent from fat.

DASH and Diabetes The DASH diet is a high-fiber diet that recommends a minimum intake of 30g of fiber daily. Fiber helps slow digestion, regulating glucose and insulin production and providing satiety. Fiber is an excellent weight-loss tool and also helps you feel full faster and longer, which may lead to a reduced caloric intake. Foods high in fiber include whole grains, legumes (beans), vegetables and fruits. It's a low-sugar diet that limits added sugar to less than five per week.

What to Eat If you're following a 2,000-calorie diet, the DASH plan allows between six and eight servings of whole grains, four to five servings each of fruits and vegetables, three servings each of fat and dairy and 6 oz. of lean protein every day. Servings of nuts, legumes and sweets are limited to less than five servings weekly. Divide your foods evenly through the day to regulate blood sugar. Maintaining a healthy body weight will lower blood pressure and help your body use insulin more effectively. The DASH plan comes with different eating plans based on caloric needs. Always talk to your doctor or dietitian before making any changes to your diet.

Making other heart healthy lifestyle changes while following the DASH eating plan is the best way to prevent or control high blood pressure. For example, try to maintain a healthy weight, be physically active, make healthy eating choices, and don't smoke.

The DASH eating plan is easy to follow using common foods available in your grocery store. The plan includes daily servings from different food groups. The number of servings you should have depends on your daily calorie (energy) needs.

One important note: If you take medicine to control high blood pressure, you should keep taking it. However, you should tell your doctor that you're now following the DASH eating plan.

To find out more information visit: www.dashdiet.org/