Dietary Approaches to Hypertension that Make a Difference

So, your doctor has told you that you have high blood pressure. One of the latest dietary eating plans to help you manage your high blood pressure is known as Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH). The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute funded research that supports findings showing DASH can lower both blood pressure and what is known as the “bad” cholesterol or LDL. By lowering both of these risks, the risk for developing heart disease is also lowered.

What is so great about the DASH eating plan? First of all, it includes the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (2005) recommendations for healthy eating of low-fat or fat-free milk products, fruits, vegetables, whole grain foods, and other foods that are heart healthy and lower in sodium (salt). These foods are loaded with the nutrients that many Americans need to increase such as calcium, potassium, fiber, and magnesium—important nutrients for managing blood pressure—plus vitamins A, C, and E. The DASH plan is rich in nutrients, protein, fiber, and phytochemicals.

The DASH eating plan is low in fat and cholesterol and features fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products, lean leg or loin cuts of red meat, fish, and chicken—trimmed of outer fat—and nuts in recommended amounts. When shopping, read the nutrition facts on food labels for total fat, saturated fat and trans fat content, plus ingredient labels to select low-fat foods. Select only lean meats; trim away visible fats; broil, roast, or poach; and remove excess fat and skin from poultry. Eat less red meat cuts containing more fat such as the arm (chuck) roast or other cuts with more seam fat covering each individual small muscle in the meat cut. Eat no more than two portions daily, each the size of a deck of playing cards.

Eat whole grain pasta, wild rice, and beans for higher-fiber choices. Eat more fresh fruits and vegetables. Select sweets, added sugars, and sugar-containing beverages less often.

Also be aware of a food’s sodium content. Read the nutrition facts on labels and words on the ingredient listing containing sodium/ salt so you can make sodium-wise selections.

Whether you are eating at home, school, on the go, or dining out in a fast food or regular restaurant, keep these DASH meal plan suggestions in mind so you can help reduce your hypertension, your LDL “bad” cholesterol, and ultimately lower your chances of developing heart disease.

To find a week’s worth of menus following the DASH plan, entitled Your Guide to Lowering Your Blood Pressure with DASH — A Week with the DASH Eating Plan, visit the website: http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/hbp/dash/week_dash.html. For a referral to a registered dietitian or for additional food and nutrition information, check out the American Dietetic Association’s website: www.eatright.org.

Contact ______________________, Texas AgriLife Extension Service ______________ County agent at ______________, for more information.

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