

DASH Eating Plan for Children & Adolescents

What is the DASH eating plan?

- DASH stands for Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (high blood pressure).
- It can help lower blood pressure in adults and adolescents, and supports healthy blood pressure in children.
- This resource is suitable for children and adolescents aged 7-18 years.
- It uses everyday foods the whole family can enjoy.



 Eat more often	 Limit
 Vegetables	 Processed or fatty meats
 Fruits	 Sugary drinks
 Wholegrain breads & cereals	 Sweets & desserts
 Milk, yoghurt, cheese (reduced fat)	 Full-fat dairy
 Lean meat, chicken, fish	 Salt (sodium)
 Nuts, seeds, legumes	

How this helps your child

- This eating plan includes foods rich in potassium, magnesium, calcium, fibre and protein.
- It is low in salt (sodium), saturated fat and added sugar.
- It can help your child:



Lower their blood pressure.



Keep their heart and kidneys healthy.

For some children with high blood pressure, these changes may reduce the need for medication (with your doctor's guidance). Being physically active and supporting a healthy body weight can improve blood pressure even more.

This guide will show you how to

- ✓ Choose foods to eat more often.
- ✓ Choose foods to limit.
- ✓ Make small changes for your family.



Cutting back on salt (sodium)

- Most children eat more salt than recommended.
- Much of the salt children eat comes from processed and packaged foods.
- Cutting back on salt is the most important way to lower your child's blood pressure.

Most salt comes from



Nutrition Information

Serving size: 60 g Servings per pack: 11

	Per serve	Per 100 g
Energy	618 kJ	1030 kJ
Protein	6.0 g	10.0 g
Fat, Total	0.9 g	1.5 g
Saturated fat	0.6 g	1.0 g
Carbohydrate	26.4 g	44.0 g
Sugars	1.8 g	3.0 g
Sodium	210 mg	350 mg

Compare foods using the "per 100 g" column.

- Best: Less than 120 mg/100 g
- OK: 120-600 mg/100 g
- Limit: More than 600 mg/100 g

Five tips to eat less salt

- Choose fresh foods**
Fresh fruit, vegetables and meat are naturally low in salt.
- Check food labels**
Look for "sodium" and compare products. Choose lower sodium options.
- Choose "no added salt" or "reduced salt"**
Look for these labels on canned vegetables, legumes, sauces and condiments.
- Ditch the salt shaker**
Add flavour with herbs, spices, garlic, chilli or ginger. Avoid gourmet salts like Pink Himalayan.
- Cook more meals at home**
Takeaway and restaurant meals are often high in salt.

Choosing lower-salt bread and cheese

- Bread can vary in salt. Choose wholegrain with less than 400 mg sodium per 100 g.
- Some cheeses are high in salt. Avoid processed cheese slices, sticks, feta and halloumi. Choose cheese with less than 670 mg sodium per 100 g.

A small number of children with certain kidney diseases should not follow a low salt diet but can still follow the general DASH Eating Plan. Your doctor will advise what is right for your child.

Getting started with DASH

- Start small. Choose one goal to focus on with your child.
- When it becomes a habit, try another.
- Changing habits takes time.



✓ Tick one change you're ready to try

Easy ways to make this happen

- ☐ Add one extra piece of fruit to your child's day.



- Offer fruit as a snack e.g. banana, apple, orange, grapes.
- Add fruit to breakfast cereal e.g. bananas or berries or whatever fruit you have on hand.
- Choose fresh, frozen or canned fruit.
- Serve fruit as a dessert.
- Make a fruit smoothie.

- ☐ Add a low-fat dairy food to your child's day.



- Offer low-fat yoghurt as a snack. Choose Greek or natural yoghurt without added sugar. Add fruit also.
- Add low-fat cheese to sandwiches or wholegrain crackers.
- Make smoothies with low-fat milk and yoghurt.
- Offer a glass of low-fat milk.

- ☐ Add nuts or seeds to your child's day. Use seeds for nut allergy.



- Offer a handful of unsalted nuts as a snack.
- Add nut butter to wholemeal toast. Try peanut, almond or cashew butter, all found in supermarkets.
- Serve hummus with veggie sticks e.g. carrot, cucumber, capsicum.
- Sprinkle sunflower and pumpkin seeds on salads, vegetables or yoghurt.

- ☐ Swap to lower salt foods.



Salty snacks



Plain rice cakes, corn thins, popcorn



Processed meats



Grilled chicken, egg, tofu



Regular soy sauce

Salt-reduced

When they become a habit, here are more ideas to try

- Add vegetables to your meals e.g. tomato and lettuce to sandwiches and wraps, add salad with meals. Pre-packaged salad bags are great for a quick easy option.
- Drink water instead of soft drinks or cordial.
- Swap processed meats in sandwiches for chicken, leftover meats, canned fish, eggs or tofu.
- Try legumes and beans. Salt reduced baked beans are a great topping for toast. Roasted chickpeas or fava beans make a great snack.
- Check food labels, compare brands and choose lower-salt options.

Next steps for your family

Top tips for parents

- Talk with your child and choose one or two small changes to start.
- Eat more fresh foods like fruits, vegetables, wholegrains, low-fat dairy, nuts and seeds, legumes, lean meat, chicken and fish. Check out the recipe and lunchbox ideas below.
- Keep lower salt snacks at home. Try fruit, unsalted nuts or popcorn, low-fat yoghurt, veggie sticks with hummus, roasted chickpeas or fava beans, wholegrain toast with nut butter or a small amount of honey or jam. Wholegrain breakfast cereal with reduced-fat milk (like whole wheat biscuits, untoasted muesli or oats) are great snacks for hungry children.
- Add beans or legumes (e.g. lentils, chickpeas, butter beans) to family meals like curries, bolognaise, Mexican, stir-fry, salads, soups and stews.
- Keep adding fruit to meals and snacks.



What a day on DASH looks like

This example shows one way to follow the DASH eating plan across the day.

Breakfast

Wholegrain breakfast cereal + milk + fruit

Lunch

Egg + salad wholegrain sandwich

Dinner

Burritos filled with chicken, beans, cheese + salad

Snacks

Fruit
Unsalted nuts
Wholegrain crackers + cheese



Choose water as a drink throughout the day.

Helpful resources

Heart Foundation Australia

Recipes the whole family can enjoy



Bang in Some Beans

Add legumes with these recipe ideas



FoodSwitch

Find lower salt options while shopping



Old Health

Simple swaps to eat less salt



Cancer Council

Healthy lunch box ideas



Where can I get more support?

Speak with your GP, paediatrician or an accredited practising dietitian.

Contact Dietitians Australia to find a dietitian:
(02) 6189 1200 | info@dietitiansaustralia.org.au

Ask your GP about a Medicare rebate. Other specialists (e.g. nephrologist or cardiologist) may also help.

This resource was developed by



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The nutrition information in this resource has been reviewed and approved by the Heart Foundation for consistency with their nutrition guidance.

The DASH Eating Plan was originally developed by the U.S. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI). This resource has been adapted for Australian children and adolescents.

Example DASH food group serves for adolescents (13-15 years)

- The DASH Eating Plan includes recommended daily serves from five food groups and guidance on foods to limit, such as foods high in salt, saturated fat and added sugar.
- Recommended serves differ for girls and boys to support growth and development.
- Remember small changes can make a difference.



Food group	Girls	Boys	Example Serving Size
Grains, mostly wholegrain	6 per day	8 per day	1 slice of bread 2/3 cup wheat cereal flakes or 1/4 cup muesli 1/2 cup cooked porridge 1/2 cup cooked rice, pasta, noodles
Vegetables	5 per day	5-6 per day	1 cup raw leafy vegetable (e.g. salad) 1/2 cup cut-up raw vegetables 1/2 cup cooked vegetables 1/2 cup vegetable juice
Fruit	3 per day	4 per day	1 medium fruit (e.g. apple, banana, orange) 2 small fruit (e.g. nectarine, plums, mandarin) 1/4 cup dried fruit 1/2 cup fresh, frozen, or canned fruit (with no added sugar) 1/2 cup of fruit juice (no more than 1 serving per day)
Reduced-fat dairy foods	3 1/2 per day	3 1/2 per day	1 cup milk or yoghurt 2 slices (40 g) of hard cheese (like cheddar) 1/2 cup ricotta cheese
Lean meats, poultry and fish or legumes	2 1/2 per day	2 1/2 per day	60 g cooked lean red meats, 80 g cooked skinless chicken, 100 g cooked fish (e.g. palm sized meat or hand sized fish) 2 eggs 1 cup cooked or canned legumes/beans (e.g. lentils, chickpeas or split peas, preferably with no added salt)
Nuts, seeds and legumes	4 per week	4 per week	1/3 cup unsalted nuts (30 g) 2 tablespoons nut butter e.g. peanut, cashew, almond - choose unsalted 2 tablespoons seeds e.g. pumpkin/sunflower seeds, tahini paste 1 cup cooked or canned legumes e.g. chickpeas, lentils. Choose no added salt or reduced salt versions
DASH unfriendly foods	Limit	Limit	If included, these foods should only be eaten sometimes and in small amounts. Processed meats (e.g. ham, salami) Sausages Salty snack foods (e.g. chips, crackers) Fast foods (e.g. meat pies) Sweet biscuits and cakes Chocolate Soft drinks Ice-cream Butter

Example food group serves are based on estimated energy requirements for adolescents aged 13–15 years (girls 7.8-8.2 MJ/d, boys 8.7-9.9 MJ/d). Individual food and energy requirements vary according to age, sex, growth and physical activity.