



# How to Get Started on the *DASH Eating Plan*

## Helpful Hints ...

- Fruits, vegetables, and whole-grain products are excellent sources of fiber and key components to the DASH diet. But, don't be discouraged if your body takes some time to adjust to new foods.
- Today, many dairy free milk alternatives are available such as coconut, almond, or soy milk for those who have trouble digesting dairy products.
- Seeds and legumes such as sunflower seeds and beans are a great alternative to nuts for those who need to avoid nuts.
- If you are taking medications to control high blood pressure, continue taking them. Be sure to tell your doctor you are now following the *DASH Eating Plan*.

For many individuals, the *DASH Eating Plan* isn't a dramatic change from their normal diet. When choosing to adopt the DASH diet and the lifestyle changes that accompany it, the "road to change" can be accomplished by simply making some small, gradual changes.

**Start slowly over the span of a few days or weeks and refer to these guidelines for help:**

- **Create a food diary:** Write down everything you eat and drink throughout the day (include detailed amounts of *what* you eat or drink, *when* you consume the item, and *why* you consumed it). After several days of record-keeping, you may start to notice a pattern emerging in your eating habits. An important part of the *DASH Eating Plan* is consuming a specific number of servings from each food group. Keeping a food diary will help you track and be more aware of food servings as well.
- **Identify the areas that need improvement:** Chances are it will be quite simple to spot the areas where your diet does not meet the *DASH Eating Plan* recommendations. Do you consume too much sodium (salt)? Do your foods contain a high amount of saturated fat? Do you need to add more fruits and vegetables to your diet? Identify these areas in order to know where to make improvements.



- **Choose what you want to change-** Based on the areas identified that need improvement, choose a starting point for change. Choose a change that is realistic and makes you feel motivated and committed. It could simply start with reducing sodium, limiting dietary fat, eating more fruits and vegetables, or consuming fat-free or low-fat dairy products. Many factors could influence this decision such as food preference or time available to make the change. Try to avoid changing your entire diet all at once. Rather, make small changes, in which you will be more likely to succeed.
- **Make a plan-** Having a plan is a necessary step in reaching your goals. Identify any barriers that may keep you from success- such as having limited time to prepare lunch for work in the morning or temptations like unhealthy snack food in vending machines. Then, brainstorm practical solutions that will help you navigate past these roadblocks- such as preparing your lunch for work the night before when you have more time or bringing along healthy snack foods from home to avoid purchasing snacks from vending machines.

Remember, the road to change can be accomplished by simply making some small, gradual changes. Let the ***DASH Eating Plan*** help you move confidently forward!

