

Senior Sense



Vol. XIV No. 1

Your Health

DASH Diet May Help Metabolic Syndrome

A condition called the Metabolic Syndrome makes you more likely to have a heart attack, stroke or diabetes. Sometimes Metabolic Syndrome is also called Syndrome X. If you have Metabolic Syndrome you have at least three of the following health risks:

- High blood pressure (over 135/85)
- High triglycerides (over 150)
- A fasting blood glucose (sugar) over 100
- HDL cholesterol less than 40 for men and less than 50 for women
- A waist measurement over 35 inches for women and 40 inches for men.

Triglycerides are blood fats that may **increase** cardiovascular risk, while HDL cholesterol is the healthy cholesterol that may **reduce** risk.

Recently researchers studied whether the DASH Diet could reduce the health risks found with the Metabolic Syndrome.

The DASH Diet has been proven to reduce blood pressure, but no one knew if it could reduce the other risk factors as well.

DASH was compared to a low calorie diet and a control or typical diet. Compared to the other two diets, the DASH diet had less meat and higher amounts of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, nuts, cooked beans and peas and non-fat and low fat dairy foods. It was also low in sodium. The DASH diet and the low calorie diet contained the same number of calories.

All the people studied were overweight or obese, did not smoke and had no current cardiovascular disease. A total of 34 men and 82 women with Metabolic Syndrome whose average age was 41 participated.

After 6 months, those on the DASH Diet showed the greatest improvement in blood pressure, HDL cholesterol, blood glucose and waist size. The DASH participants also lost the most weight. On average they lost 30-35 pounds –

slightly more than those on the low calorie diet alone.

At the end of the study, 100% of the people on the control diet still had Metabolic Syndrome, but only 81% of those following the low calorie diet and 65% of those on the DASH diet did.

The New U.S. Dietary Guidelines recommend the DASH Diet as one type of healthy meal plan that people can follow. This new research adds more support to that recommendation.

The DASH Diet

Food Group	Servings	Examples of 1 Serving
Grains and grain products	7-8	1 slice whole wheat bread 1 ounce whole grain dry cereal ½ cup cooked brown rice, whole wheat pasta, or cooked oatmeal
Vegetables	4-5	1 cup raw leafy vegetable ½ cup cooked vegetable 6 ounces vegetable juice
Fruits	4-5	6 ounces fruit juice 1 medium or ½ cup fresh fruit ¼ cup dried fruit ½ cup canned or frozen fruit
Low fat or fat free dairy foods	2-3	8 ounces fat free or low fat milk, buttermilk or yogurt 1 ½ ounce low fat or fat free cheese
Meat, poultry or fish	2 or less	3 ounces of meat, fish or poultry
Nuts, seeds, and dried beans	4-5 per week	⅓ cup or 1 ½ ounce nuts 2 tablespoons seeds ½ cooked dried beans and peas
Fats and Oils	2-3	1 teaspoon margarine or oil 2 tablespoons low fat mayonnaise or light salad dressing
Sweets	5 per week (ideally low fat)	1 tablespoon sugar, jelly, or jam 8 ounces lemonade ½ ounce jelly beans

Your Resources

Beware of Home Improvement Scams

This is the time of year people start knocking on your door and calling to offer you seemingly great deals on home improvements. A contractor may stop by your home and provide an estimate to repair the roof or paint the house. The price may sound reasonable and the work may need to be done but you can't afford it. The contractor generously offers to arrange financing through a lender he works with. Work begins on the house before the paperwork is signed and when you refuse to sign blank or incomplete documents, the contractor threatens to quit working on the project. You may feel pressured and go ahead and sign the loan documents only to find out later that you now have a high interest rate home equity loan with a monthly payment you cannot afford to make. The contractor may leave before the job is finished or may do substandard work.

Take steps now to protect yourself from falling victim to unscrupulous contractors. Start by deciding what repairs need to be done. If you need to borrow money to do the work, carefully examine your financing options. Then find a qualified contractor to do the work. Avoid contractors who:

- solicit door-to-door
- accept only cash payment
- ask you to get all of the required building permits
- do not list a business number in the local telephone directory
- pressure you for an immediate decision
- tell you your job will cost less because it is a "demonstration project"
- pressure you for an immediate decision
- ask you to pay for the entire job up front
- offer to arrange financing through a lender he knows (the contractor is probably receiving a referral fee)
- misrepresent the quality of products by making false claims of health benefits or energy savings

You may feel pressured and go ahead and sign the loan documents only to find out later that you now have a high interest rate home equity loan with a monthly payment you cannot afford to make.

- scare you by claiming that your health and safety are in danger if the repairs are not done.

Interview the contractors and obtain estimates

from at least three. Below are some questions to ask each contractor.

- How long have you been in business? (Look for a well-established company that has not been doing business under several different names.)
- What licenses do you hold; *i.e.*, electrician, plumber, general contractor? (General contractors will need a license from the state of Georgia by July 1, 2007 for work over \$2,500.)
- How many projects similar to this one

- did you complete in the previous year?
- Are any permits required for this project?
 - May I have a list of at least three references for projects similar to mine? (Contact the references and ask when the project was completed; if it was completed on time; if they were satisfied with the quality of work; if there were any unexpected costs; if they would use the contractor again; and if you can see the completed project.)
 - Will you be using subcontractors on the project? (Ask to meet the subcontractors and make sure they have insurance and licenses, if required. These individuals can place a mechanic's lien on your property if the contractor fails to pay them. Ask for a lien release or lien waiver.)
 - What type of insurance do you carry and may I have a copy? (Contractors should carry personal liability, worker's compensation and property damage.)
 - May I see sample of the contract you use?

Protect yourself by thoroughly checking into the background and qualifications of the contractor you select. Once you choose a contractor, get a written contract that clearly spells out who will be performing the work, estimated start and completion dates, payment terms and site clean-up details. Hold back at least ten 10% until the work is satisfactorily completed. You have three days to cancel your contract.

Beware of anything that sounds too good to be true. It probably isn't true. For

more information visit the Federal Trade Commission website (www.ftc.gov).

Your Relationships

Seniors and Terrorism

Martha, an 83-year-old widow, was proud of her ability to live at home by herself and remain generally independent. The TV was her constant companion. Since the attacks of 9/11, she watched lots of news reports of terrorist attacks around the world and worried if she might be at risk. She became increasingly suspicious of strangers and began to dread going to the grocery.

Terrorist attacks and images of war seem to dominate much of the news recently. Everyone responds to these reports with varying levels of stress, depending on personal, family, and community resources. Seniors are not immune to this stress, of course. Their responses are similar to, as well as different from, responses by other age groups.

In general, the more direct your exposure to trauma and stress, the more serious your response will be. Hearing about terrorism on news reports from a faraway land is one level of exposure. Terror attacks closer to home are usually more threatening. Having friends or family directly involved in terror attacks or war is even more stressful. Finally, being directly victimized by terror, such as the persons in the World Trade Center, is most stressful and long-lasting.

Several studies have shown that many seniors seem to have developed resiliency to stress that is stronger than that of younger persons. It seems that many seniors who have experienced a lifetime of stressors have developed coping strategies that serve them well. This is referred to as “stress inoculation.” Many seniors tell themselves, “I’ve survived worse than this before; I can get through this too.” Seniors tend to respond to reports of terror with more sadness and sympathy, but with less shock and anger, than younger adults.

On the other hand, some seniors who have experienced extreme trauma over a long period of time, such as from chronic disease, discrimination, or having been a prisoner of war, can be *more* vulnerable the effects of additional stress. We don’t yet understand all the factors that may predict which persons will become more or less resilient in response to chronic stress.

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Being able to use community resources to cope with stress is an important coping tool for everyone. Seniors who may have limited mobility or few friends may be less able to tap these resources to help themselves.

For many seniors, the stress they feel from terrorism is similar to many other stressors in their lives. The proven strategies for coping with that stress are similar as well.

- Maintain routines. Within reason, try to go about your daily life as normally

as possible. Go to church on Wednesday evenings if that is your habit. Check in with your friends and family regularly.

- Take good care of yourself. Your body’s ability to withstand stress depends on how physically fit you are. Good nutrition and regular exercise can help you fight off the effects of stress. Doing the things you enjoy, and being around people who make you feel good, is also taking good care of yourself
- Find a way to contribute. Most seniors don’t have fulltime jobs, so they seek ways to be useful by volunteering or helping others. In addition to providing vital services, this helps create a sense of meaning and purpose for living, which

in turn helps build more stress resistance. In a recent national survey of seniors, “having something

meaningful to do” was among the most preferred activities.

Whether stress results from exposure to terrorism, the debilitating effects of chronic disease, or even natural disasters such as hurricanes, seniors can take an active role in helping themselves and others cope. The decision to overcome these challenges, instead of simply being victimized by them, is itself a positive coping strategy.

Source: American Psychological Association, 2005.



THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

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Dear Friend:

SENIOR SENSE is a quarterly publication provided by your local county Cooperative Extension office. It is prepared by Extension Family & Consumer Sciences specialists at The University of Georgia specifically for the educational needs of older Georgians.

Please contact your local Cooperative Extension office for more information on these and related topics.

Learning *for* Life

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