



A DASH of prevention

Fed up with taking pills for every medical problem, Americans are increasingly turning to more “natural” treatment strategies, including diet. Diets have been advocated for almost every ailment known to man. A Google search on the phrase “eating right” turns up 5.5 million references.

Few of these culinary recommendations have much of a scientific basis, but in this issue of the *Journal*, Dr. Karanja and colleagues¹ discuss a notable exception—the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet.^{2,3} The DASH study showed that a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and fiber with restriction of fat, refined carbohydrates, and sodium lowers blood pressure about as much as a single antihypertensive drug.

The authors suggest that one of the best ways to use this approach is in people with prehypertension, with minimal elevations of blood pressure, for whom the use of drugs may not be indicated or necessary. Such people have an increased risk of developing cardiovascular disease, and the DASH diet may have preventive value.

Although the dietary path to good health has many attractions, it requires a degree of discipline that many people cannot readily achieve. Mason Cooley⁴ noted that “at the end of every diet, the path curves back toward the trough,” a sentiment to which many of us can all too easily relate. Although acknowledging this problem, Karanja et al are optimistic about the potency of counseling in the office on matters of lifestyle, and they present a roadmap for the physician interested in pursuing this approach. The DASH diet is clearly a useful tool for the dedicated patient.

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■ REFERENCES

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