Campus dining and high blood pressure

Alice,

I have a high blood pressure problem. What kind of food should I get at the campus dining hall?

? Pumping

Answer

Dear Pumping,

It?s great that you?re thinking about how your diet can help you manage your high blood pressure (HBP). While being thoughtful about what you eat can certainly be a part of the healthy blood pressure equation, there are additional factors to consider and incorporate when trying to lower your BP numbers:

- Maintaining a healthy body weight ? as body weight increases, so does blood pressure. In addition to a balanced diet, getting regular physical activity and watching your waistline can go a long way to manage your blood pressure.
- Managing stress levels [2] ? adopting healthy stress-coping strategies can help reduce chronic stress, which is a noted contributor to high blood pressure.
- Reducing or avoiding intake of certain foods and substances ? lower blood pressure may call for reducing sodium and sugar intake, lowering saturated fat consumption, passing on trans fats, limiting alcohol and caffeine, and if you smoke, quitting [3].

Specifically, in terms of eating on campus, look for these foods to add to your plate to help you in your quest for lower blood pressure:

- **Fruits and vegetables** [4]: At breakfast, try adding fruit (fresh or dried) to cereal, yogurt, or oatmeal. Grab an apple, banana, orange, or a pear alongside a veggie soup or sandwich for lunch. At dinner, pile your plate with leafy greens and make a tasty salad or add a generous side of steamed carrots, broccoli, or asparagus to your meal.
- **Whole grains** [5]: If you fancy a bagel or toast to start your morning, make sure to select ones that are 100 percent whole wheat. For lunch, try a whole grain salad with quinoa, wheat berries, or brown rice. Got a craving for an Italian dinner? Opt for whole wheat pasta with your marinara sauce.
• **Proteins (including poultry sans skin, lean meats, beans, and fatty fish)**: When perusing options in the morning, consider opting for beans in your breakfast burrito or egg scramble. Try a fresh roasted turkey breast wrap or veggie burger for lunch. Baked or grilled chicken or salmon may be what hits the spot right around supper time.

• **Low-fat or fat-free calcium sources**: For a creamy, dreamy breakfast, request that skim dairy milk, low-fat fortified soy milk, or fat-free yogurt in your favorite fruit smoothie order. At lunch, grab a side of low-fat cottage cheese. If dinner calls for a grilled cheese sandwich to go along with your tomato soup, ask for a low-fat variety.

Now that you know a bit more about what foods will help you to curate a healthy and balanced plate in the dining hall, you might also want to look out for these same foods beyond the campus boundaries. It’s also a good rule of thumb to familiarize yourself with nutrition labels so you can identify these ingredients and nutrients in pre-packaged foods as well.

Overall though, it’s good to keep in mind that what you eat is just one factor that influences blood pressure. Taking into consideration other lifestyle habits and behaviors that contribute to high blood pressure are also key components to getting your BP numbers to a healthy range. The good news is that you don’t have to do it all on your own; your health care provider can give you additional advice and support as you move forward. You might also consult with a registered dietitian to help guide you through the dining options at your school; many campuses employ these professionals to help students do just that! Lastly, to learn a bit more about managing high blood pressure, take a look at the related Q&As from the *Go Ask Alice!* archives.

Happy dining!

Alice!

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- Medical Services (Morningside)
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