



## *DASHing High Blood Pressure*

You can bring down high blood pressure by changing the way you eat. Just ask Joe Wagner.

Wagner's blood pressure was 150/100 two years ago. Now it is 130/80, which is close to the 119/79 level that is considered the healthiest for adults. He also lost 20 pounds.

Wagner made the changes by following a diet called the Dietary Approaches to

Stop Hypertension—or the DASH diet, for short. He learned about the diet through a special computer-based project at his job.

"I didn't exactly follow it to the letter," says Wagner. "But I basically followed the advice on the Web site."

Doctors at Harvard Medical School developed the DASH diet several years ago. It emphasizes fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy products. The diet was developed to test whether eating habits could lower blood pressure as much as blood-pressure pills.

Studies have shown that it does.

"The results were better than we ever dreamed of," says Dr. Frank Sacks, the Harvard doctor who led the DASH diet studies. Sacks says if people followed DASH it could be a substitute for the "gazillions" of dollars spent every year on blood-pressure pills.

Wagner just wanted to avoid taking pills, period. "I don't like taking medicines for anything. I will take an aspirin for a headache but that is about it."

Wagner works at a computer company called EMC Corporation outside of Boston. The computer-based project he enrolled in is part of a Boston University study. The researchers hope to show that weekly e-mails and postings on a special Web site will help people stick with the DASH diet. They also collect blood pressure and weight information from people so

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they can track their progress. So far, about 1,000 EMC employees have participated.

Before he started the DASH diet, Wagner's eating habits were...well, in his words, he was "pretty much a junk food junkie." Burger King Whoppers on the way home. A real weakness for Twinkies.

His favorite sport to watch on TV? "The worst—football," says Wagner, "because it is on during the late fall and winter when you're not that active anyway."

Besides eating more fruits and vegetables ("vegetables for breakfast sometimes, believe it or not," he says), breakfast cereal made from whole grain, and a lot less meat, Wagner does not snack so much between meals. At work, he chomps on sugarless gum instead.

But Wagner says the DASH diet worked for him partly because it is "not really that severe." It even allows for some sweets and fatty food. Every once in a while he gives into temptation and has a big bowl of ice cream.

The e-mails have worked to encourage him to stick with it. He feels like he has a bit more energy. His clothes fit better, too.

But Wagner's eight-year-old son isn't too happy about his dad's diet. "He hates it, laughs Wagner. "Before DASH, I used to take him out to Burger King and McDonald's."