

# Teaching DASH to Lower Blood Pressure

Category: Eating

written by Abbey Pachter | December 30, 2021

Julie was in the twelve-week, RN-to-BSN capstone course I taught. I suggested students create a project from an issue they were passionate about because it could prepare them for a master's thesis or even lifelong work. Julie chose teaching parishioners at her church healthier eating habits. She believed they could reduce risks from high blood pressure that disproportionately affect BIPOC (Black, indigenous, persons of color) communities.

On the Mayo Clinic web site, Julie found the "DASH Diet," (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension), and she decided to implement its information and teaching materials. "DASH encourages reducing sodium salt, saturated fats and added sugars in favor of more fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, legumes and healthy fats. It is high in potassium, calcium and magnesium, all of which help lower blood pressure," Julie taught us.

With her pastor's approval, Julie recruited volunteers to meet weekly after church. Several already had high blood pressure. One had renal failure and was on weekly dialysis. Most came with a spouse who prepared their meals. Julie delivered weekly lessons including reading food labels, modifying familiar recipes, determining appropriate portions and selecting healthier alternatives within each food group.

Students presented progress to our small class using their evolving PowerPoint™ presentations. Each week a section was added: problem statements, goals, definition of terms, supportive research literature, methods, implementation. We all made suggestions for improving clarity and helped strategize their next weeks' plans.

Julie's last meeting with her participants was a potluck. They were to bring food that showed what they'd learned. She was completely surprised when she saw and tasted what they'd brought. To her disappointment, each brought their favorite recipe. Unaltered.

Class discussion provided more learning. The students learned that patient education about nutrition (or any subject) is not as simple as providing information. Behavioral change seldom occurs as the result of any one project or lesson. Although hers had an unexpected outcome, Julie learned more about people, culture, nursing, and the research process, adding these findings to her presentation as results, evaluation and suggestions for future projects.

At the conclusion of the course, Julie and her classmates presented formally to their sponsors, the other nursing students, and University faculty. This brought pride and a great sense of accomplishment. Everyone gained a deeper understanding of the complexities of culture, research and teaching.

*Abbey Pachter*

*Virginia Beach, Virginia*