

Evidence-Based Natural Medicine for Hypertension

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Who Am I and What is Evidence-Based Natural Medicine?

So What Is Blood Pressure Anyway?

Blood pressure is the force of your blood pushing against the walls of your arteries. Each time your heart beats, it pumps out blood into the arteries. Your blood pressure is highest when your heart beats, pumping the blood. This is called systolic pressure. When your heart is at rest, between beats, your blood pressure falls. This is the diastolic pressure.

How High Is High?

Your blood pressure reading uses these two numbers, the systolic and diastolic pressures. Usually they are written one above or before the other. A reading of :

120/80 or lower is normal blood pressure
140/90 or higher is high blood pressure

between 120 and 139 for the top number, or between 80 and 89 for the bottom number is prehypertension.

High blood pressure usually has no symptoms, but it can cause serious problems such as stroke, heart failure, heart attack and kidney failure.

DISCLAIMER: CHECK WITH YOUR PHYSICIAN BEFORE MAKING ANY CHANGE IN DIET OR LIFESTYLE

What Can I Do About It Anyway?

LIFESTYLE:

Physical Activity

A solid body of evidence shows that men and women of all age groups who are physically active have a decreased risk of developing hypertension. Findings from multiple randomized clinical trials indicate that exercise lowers blood pressure as much as do some drugs. People with mild and moderately elevated blood pressure who exercise 30 to 60 minutes three to four days per week (walking, jogging, cycling, or a combination) might be able to significantly decrease their blood pressure.

Breathing and Stress Management

Recent studies suggest that ancient relaxation methods that include controlled breathing and gentle physical activity — such as yoga, Qigong, and Tai Chi — are beneficial. People with mild hypertension who practiced these healing techniques daily for two to three months experienced significant decreases in their blood pressure, had lower levels of stress hormones, and were less anxious compared with subjects in control groups.

Stop Smoking

Weight Reduction

Dietary Changes

Sodium Intake

Primitive societies exposed to very little salt suffer from little or no hypertension. Salt (sodium chloride) intake has also been definitively linked to hypertension in western societies. Reducing salt intake in the diet lowers blood pressure in most people. The more salt is restricted, the greater the blood pressure-lowering effect.

Vegetarian

Vegetarians have lower blood pressure than do people who eat meat. This occurs partly because fruits and vegetables contain potassium—a known blood pressure-lowering mineral. The best way to supplement potassium is with fruit, which contains more of the mineral than do potassium supplements. However, fruit contains so much potassium that people taking “potassium-sparing” diuretics can consume too much potassium simply by eating several pieces of fruit per day.

Reusing Vegetable Oils

Reusing vegetable oils for frying, especially oils with high concentrations of unsaturated fatty acids (such as sunflower or safflower oil) has been associated with an increased risk of high blood pressure. Presumably, this increased risk is due to some of the degradation products (such as lipid peroxides or polymers) that result from the excessive heating of these oils. Frying with more stable oils, such as olive oil, is not associated with an increased risk of high blood pressure.

Fiber

Several double-blind trials have shown that adding 6.5–7 grams of fiber per day to the diet for several months leads to reductions in blood pressure.

Sugar

Sugar has been reported to increase blood pressure in animals and humans in short-term trials. Though the real importance of this experimental effect remains unclear, some doctors recommend that people with high blood pressure cut back on their intake of sugar.

Tomato Products

In a double-blind trial, supplementation with a tomato extract significantly lowered both systolic and diastolic blood pressure, compared with a placebo, in people with hypertension. The amount of extract used was 250 mg per day (providing 15 mg per day of lycopene plus other carotenoids) for eight weeks.

Garlic, Onions, Celery

Garlic has a mild blood pressure-lowering effect, according to an analysis of ten double-blind trials. All of these trials administered garlic for at least four weeks, typically using 600–900 mg of garlic extract per day. Onion—closely related to garlic—may also have a mild blood pressure-lowering effect, according to preliminary research.

Supplements

Co Q10

Both preliminary and double-blind trials have reported that supplementation with Coenzyme Q10 (CoQ10) leads to a significant decrease in blood pressure in people with hypertension. Much of this research has used 100 mg of CoQ10 per day for at least ten weeks.

Fish Oils

EPA and DHA, the omega-3 fatty acids found in fish oil, lower blood pressure, according to an analysis of 31 trials. Some trials using over 3 grams per day of omega-3 reported significant reductions in blood pressure.

Magnesium

Some, but not all, trials show that magnesium supplements—typically 350–500 mg per day—lower blood pressure. Magnesium appears to be particularly effective in people who are taking potassium-depleting diuretics. Potassium-depleting diuretics also deplete magnesium. Therefore, the drop in blood pressure resulting from magnesium supplementation in people taking these drugs may result from overcoming a mild magnesium deficiency.

Vitamin D

In a double-blind trial, women with low blood levels of vitamin D (measured as 25-hydroxyvitamin D3) were given a calcium supplement, plus either 800 IU of vitamin D per day or a placebo for eight weeks. Compared with the placebo, vitamin D significantly reduced systolic blood pressure by an average of 9.3%, but did not affect diastolic blood pressure.

Melatonin

In a double-blind study, supplementation with 2 mg of sustained-release melatonin each night for four weeks significantly reduced nighttime systolic blood pressure, compared with a placebo, in people with nocturnal hypertension. Normally, blood pressure declines at night. People with hypertension who do not have this nighttime blood pressure decline are at increased risk of developing and dying from heart disease. Melatonin supplementation may therefore be beneficial for this subgroup of people with hypertension.

Hawthorn Leaf

Hawthorn leaf and flower extracts have been reported to have a mild blood pressure–lowering effect in people with early stage congestive heart failure. In a double-blind study, supplementation with a hawthorn extract significantly decreased diastolic blood pressure in people with type 2 diabetes. The amount used was 1,200 mg per day of an extract standardized to 2.2% flavonoids corresponding to 6 per day of dried flowering tops.

Other Treatments and Tests

Acupuncture

Extensive research on the effectiveness of acupuncture for lowering blood pressure has been reported.