



# 16 Natural Ways to Lower Blood Pressure

Drugs and a low-salt diet aren't the only ways to deal with high blood pressure.

## High Blood Pressure Remedies

As many as two out of three adults with diabetes also have hypertension (high blood pressure), and both conditions increase your risk of heart attack, stroke, and eye and kidney diseases.

Like blood sugar, your blood pressure levels can fluctuate throughout the day. Normal readings are at or below 120/80 mmHg, but a single reading above that isn't cause for

alarm. Hypertension is defined as two or more consecutive readings above 140/90mmHg.

Treatment goals vary based on your risk factors for heart disease, so talk to your doctor about the blood pressure goal that is right for you. If your blood pressure is elevated, your doctor may recommend lifestyle changes before prescribing medication. Check out these 16 natural ways to lower blood pressure — they're worth adopting whether or not you have hypertension.

## **1. Cut back on salt.**

Start reading food labels; any reduction will help. If everyone in America cut their salt intake to no more than 1,500 mg a day, 16 million cases of high blood pressure would be prevented every year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (Current average daily intake for Americans exceeds 3,400mg, and not because we overuse the salt shaker—all of the prepared foods we buy are full of added sodium.)

## **2. De-stress.**

A recent review of studies on stress reduction techniques and blood pressure found that meditation, biofeedback, stress management training, and progressive muscle relaxation were all effective in lowering blood pressure. Another study found that listening to relaxing music can have an impact on your blood pressure. A common recommendation from the findings is to choose slow and flowing music and to listen for at least thirty minutes. The most important factor is that you choose music that you enjoy. It's not exactly clear how listening to music helps lower blood pressure; further research is underway. One theory is that focusing on the music helps you relax by affecting your breathing. Another theory is that music directs your attention to a more pleasant emotional state, which helps you relax and causes your body to release endorphins.

## **3. Go easy on the alcohol.**

Experts recommend no more than one drink a day for women and two drinks a day for men. In fact, studies show that when heavy drinkers cut down on alcohol, it lowers blood pressure. If you drink alcohol and are at risk of high blood pressure, talk to your doctor.

## **4. Pile on potassium.**

The U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) recommends that adults consume at least 4,700 milligrams (mg) of potassium a day and no more than 2,300 mg of sodium. (However, most Americans do the reverse—we consume twice as much sodium as potassium.) A review of studies published in 2013 found that eating foods rich in potassium may help lower blood pressure. Good, low-glycemic sources of potassium include soybeans, avocados, tomato sauce and paste, beet greens, spinach, halibut, lima beans, and lentils.

## **5. Get more magnesium.**

Eating foods rich in magnesium may also benefit blood pressure control. A recent review of studies found an inverse relationship between dietary magnesium and blood pressure. Research also links magnesium intake to a reduced risk of stroke and preeclampsia (pregnancy-induced hypertension). The USDA recommends between 310 mg and 420 mg of magnesium a day for adults. Good sources of magnesium include:

- Almonds: 80 mg in 1 ounce.
- Spinach: 78 mg in 1/2 cup.
- Edamame: 50 mg in 1/2 cup.
- Milk: 27 mg in 1 cup.

## **6. Don't forget milk.**

Calcium-rich foods like milk have also been shown to reduce blood pressure. The USDA recommends 1,000 mg to 1,200 mg of calcium a day for adults, the amount found in two to three 8-ounce glasses of milk. Other good sources of calcium include:

- Yogurt: 415 mg per 8-ounce serving of plain yogurt.
- Cheese: 307 mg in 1.5 ounces of cheddar cheese.
- Tofu: 250 mg in ½ cup of firm tofu.
- Kale: 94 mg of calcium in 1 cup of cooked kale.

## **7. Have a potato.**

Ok, maybe just a small one. They're not only rich in potassium, they contain a blood-pressure lowering compound called kukoamines, a substance previously only known to be found in Chinese herbal medicine. If you don't want to blow your carbs on potatoes, try tomatoes instead. They contain kukoamines, too, but in lower concentrations.

## **8. Sweeten with stevia rather than sugar.**

This plant extract has no calories or carbohydrates and shouldn't impact your blood sugar, but it might help lower your blood pressure. Some research suggests that a daily dose of 750 mg of stevioside, which is found in stevia, can lower blood pressure. While many people like its sweet taste, others find it bitter. Try the different stevia products on the market. Since stevia is a plant, the least-processed version is the leaf of the plant itself. Stevia comes in liquid and powder versions as well. Some popular products include Truvia, SweetLeaf, and NuNaturals. Remember to read the ingredient list before picking the stevia product for you— some brands include additional ingredients like sugar alcohols (erythritol) or a dextrose.

## **9. Snack on celery.**

A compound in celery relaxes the smooth muscle lining of blood vessels, reducing blood pressure. Research suggests that celery and celery seed extract may have clinically relevant effects on lowering blood pressure. Either way, adding more vegetables to your diet will help improve your overall health.

## **10. Go fish.**

Cold water fish, such as salmon, tuna, herring, mackerel, and halibut are rich in the omega-3 fatty acids DHA (docosahexaenoic acid) and EPA (eicosapentaenoic acid), which may help to reduce blood pressure. If you're not a fish eater, try omega-3 enriched eggs or peanut butter—or talk to your doctor about taking fish oil capsules or a prescription omega-3 supplement.

## **11. Munch on walnuts.**

They're rich in the omega-3 fatty acid ALA (alpha-linolenic acid), which may also help lower blood pressure. For the best bang, go for English walnuts—they contain the most ALA. You can also get ALA from flaxseeds, tofu, or flaxseed and walnut oils.

## **12. Spice it up.**

Cooking with spices not only boosts the flavor of low-sodium fare, certain spices may help lower blood pressure as well. Fennel, oregano, black pepper, basil, and tarragon are all reported to help reduce blood pressure. The bittersweet herb saffron may also lower blood pressure.

## **13. A clove a day.**

Research has found that garlic supplements may be as effective in relieving hypertension as some commonly used blood pressure medications. Garlic is generally well-tolerated and comes without side effects (aside from garlic breath!). Talk to your doctor about recommended daily intake of garlic or garlic supplements as a part of your healthcare routine.

## **14. Eat your spinach.**

Folate-rich foods, such as spinach, are associated with a lower risk of hypertension. Other good sources of folate include any dark green leafy vegetables, legumes, and asparagus.

## 15. Be social.

Research has found that people with fewer social connections were more likely to have high blood pressure. Social relationships, both quality and quantity, are protective health factors across the life span.

## 16. Enjoy chocolate, as long as it's dark.

Indulge in a little dark chocolate every day. Several studies show it's good for heart health and reduces blood pressure. (Not to mention what it does for your mood!)

### SOURCES

- Aburto, N. J., Hanson, S., Gutierrez, H., Hooper, L., Elliot, P., and Cappuccio, F. P. 2013. "Effect of increased potassium intake on cardiovascular risk factors and disease: Systematic review and meta-analyses." *BMJ* 346: f1378.
- American Diabetes Association. 2017. "Standards of medical care in diabetes – 2017." *Diabetes Care* 20 (1): S1-S135.
- American Diabetes Association. 2014. "High blood pressure" American Diabetes Association. Last Modified March 21, 2017. <http://www.diabetes.org/are-you-at-risk/lower-your-risk/bloodpressure.html>.
- Bellows, L., and Moore, R. 2013. "Diet and hypertension." Colorado State University Extension Fact Sheet Number 9.318. Last Modified February 2013. <http://extension.colostate.edu/docs/pubs/foodnut/09318.pdf>.
- Husain, K., Ansari, R. A., and Ferder, L. 2014. "Alcohol-induced hypertension: Mechanism and prevention." *World Journal of Cardiology* 6 (5): 245-252.
- Jackson, S. L., Coleman King, S. M., Zhao, L., and Cogswell, M. E. 2016. "Prevalence of excess sodium intake in the United States – NHANES, 2009-2012." *MMWR* 64 (5): 1393-1397.
- Kuhlmann, A. Y. R., Etnel, J. R. G., Roos-Hesselink, J. W., Jeekel, J., Bogers, A. J. J. C., and Takkenberg, J. J. M. 2016. "Systematic review and meta-analysis of music interventions in hypertension treatment: a quest for answers." *BMC Cardiovascular Disorders* 16 (69).
- Madhavi, D., Kagan, D., Rao, V., and Murray, M. T. 2013. "A pilot study to evaluate the antihypertensive effects of a celery extract in mild to moderate hypertension patients." *Natural Medicine Journal* 5 (4).

Ried, K. 2016. "Garlic lowers blood pressure in hypertensive individuals, regulates serum cholesterol, and stimulates immunity: an updated meta-analysis and review." *The Journal of Nutrition* 146 (2): 3895-3965.

UNH Staff. 2017. "Stress reduction is blood pressure reduction." *UNH Daily*. Last modified March 23, 2017. <http://universityhealthnews.com/daily/stress-anxiety/stress-reduction-is-blood-pressure-reduction-chill-out/>.

U. S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2014. "Measuring blood pressure." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Last Modified November 13, 2014. <https://www.cdc.gov/bloodpressure/measure.htm>.

U. S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2016. "Sodium fact sheet." CDC Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention. Last Modified February 29, 2017. [https://www.cdc.gov/dhdsp/data\\_statistics/fact\\_sheets/fs\\_sodium.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/dhdsp/data_statistics/fact_sheets/fs_sodium.htm).

U. S. Department of Agriculture. 2015. "Dietary guidelines for Americans 2015-2020: Eighth Edition." *Health.gov*. Accessed March 27, 2017. [https://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/resources/2015-2020\\_Dietary\\_Guidelines.pdf](https://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/resources/2015-2020_Dietary_Guidelines.pdf).

U. S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2015. "Following the DASH eating plan." NIH National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. Last Modified September 16, 2015. <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/dash/followdash>.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2016. "Calcium: Dietary supplement fact sheet." NIH Office of Dietary Supplements. Last Modified November 17, 2016. <https://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/Calcium-HealthProfessional/>.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2016. "Magnesium: Fact sheet for health professionals." NIH Office of Dietary Supplements. Last Modified February 11, 2016. <https://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/Magnesium-HealthProfessional/>.

U. S. National Library of Medicine. 2016. "Stevia." *MedlinePlus.gov*. Last Modified June 29, 2016. <https://medlineplus.gov/druginfo/natural/682.html>

World Health Organization. 2017. "Increasing potassium intake to reduce blood pressure and risk of cardiovascular diseases in adults." WHO e-Library of Evidence for Nutrition Actions (eLENA). Accessed March 27, 2017. [http://www.who.int/elena/titles/potassium\\_cvd\\_adults/en/](http://www.who.int/elena/titles/potassium_cvd_adults/en/)

World Health Organization. 2013. "WHO issues new guidance on dietary salt and potassium." WHO Media Centre. Last Modified January 31, 2013.

[http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/notes/2013/salt\\_potassium\\_20130131/en/](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/notes/2013/salt_potassium_20130131/en/)

Yang, Y. C., Boen, C., Gerken, K., Li, T., Schorpp, K., and Harris, K. M. 2016. "Social relationships and physiological determinants of longevity across the human life span." PNAS, 113 (3): 578-583.

Zhang, X., Li, Y., Del Gobbo, L. C., Rosanoff, A., Wang, J., Zhang, W., and Song, Y. 2016. "Effects of magnesium supplementation on blood pressure." Hypertension 68: 324-333.

*Updated by Julia Telfer, 3/17.*