

Natural Approaches to Lowering Blood Pressure

By Kristen Plunkett, ND

If you are tired of taking pharmaceutical medications every day, or want to prevent taking the large amount of pills your parents had to take for heart disease, this is the article for you. Many pharmaceuticals can also lead to nutritional deficiencies that can further worsen your cardiovascular health. Treating high blood pressure naturally does take more effort on your part than just popping that pill, but you will see that it results in making you feel better. Proper diet, exercise and stress management go a long way to help blood pressure but they also help optimize your metabolism so your cells are energized. This results in the prevention of many chronic health diseases. It is important to figure out why you have high blood pressure to optimize the treatment. Consider a comprehensive Cardio-Metabolic Panel (available at our office) or schedule a visit to evaluate the cause of your hypertension. In the meantime, implement these changes:

Step One: Start an exercise program. If you have been inactive, start with 10 minutes once a day and build up as you can to a higher frequency and intensity. Exercise helps with vasodilation, the arteries open up to let blood flow more freely. It also helps with producing more blood vessels to areas that are not getting adequate oxygen. It helps the heart tolerate stress so you are more likely to survive a heart attack in the future. Exercise also helps improve your body mass. Losing even 10lb is enough to lower your blood pressure by 10 points.

Step Two: Decrease inflammation. Inflammation causes more restriction of the diameter of your blood vessels which causes the blood pressure to go up. If you have diastolic hypertension where the bottom number is above 90, it is more likely that inflammation is playing a role in your hypertension. This inflammation is detrimental for the health of the blood vessels and will cause further damage and increase your risk of heart attack and strokes. Joint and muscle pain can be another indication that your inflammation level is high. Inflammation comes from poor diet, allergies and/or infection. A study was done that looked at people's inflammation before eating and after eating a standard American meal. It found their ESR (inflammation marker) went up, but when they added broccoli to that same meal they found the ESR went down further than it was prior to eating. Antioxidants from fruits and veggies are excellent anti-inflammatory sources of food. My favorite antioxidants include green tea, turmeric, cinnamon, cloves, oregano, and berries. I tell my patients to try to get veggies from all colors of the rainbow every day, and skittles do not count! Switch from regular potatoes to sweet potatoes or yams. Switch from iceberg lettuce to a green spring mix. If you are not a salad eater, start doing a green smoothie every day with spinach, ½ banana, handful of blueberries and either protein powder or organic yogurt. Once you get past the color you will find it tastes pretty good! Adding flax or chia seed in the smoothie also adds more omega 3s which are anti-inflammatory and protective to the cardiovascular system.

Step Three: Decrease salt. Not every person with high blood pressure has sensitivity to salt but if you are the one, this is an easy fix. Try one to two weeks with no added salt in your diet. This is harder than you think; many processed foods add a lot of sodium. You do not need to avoid

sodium rich veggies, just the added salt. If your blood pressure has gone down then goes back up after you add salt back in, it is more important for you to avoid salt in your diet.

Step Four: Decrease your Stress!!! This is a major cause of many peoples hypertension. Just 10 slow deep abdominal breaths can lower your blood pressure by 10 points. I use a teeter-totter as a visual. The more stress you are under tips the teeter-totter to one side, you need to practice more stress management activities to tip it back into balance. These activities do not take a lot of time but they need to be put into your *daily schedule*. Examples include: deep breathing, meditation, prayer, yoga, tai chi, qi gong, massage, Epsom salt soaks with essential oils, there is even a free smart-app called “GPS for the Soul.” Take time out from your busy schedule to have fun with family and friends. When life is busy we like to put all these things on hold, but if you can get them in, a little goes a long way to lower your blood pressure and improve your quality of life.

If these 4 easy steps do not work to lower your blood pressure by at least 10 points in 1 month you should be evaluated further to identify the cause of your high blood pressure. Come check out our Cardio-Metabolic panel for \$125 (or less with certain insurances). There are also many herbal therapies that can lower blood pressure and improve your cardiovascular health, but they are more successful when geared towards your personal cause(s) of high blood pressure. Schedule today to learn more!