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5 Natural Ways to Lower Blood Pressure

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If you have high blood pressure, making some healthy lifestyle changes could save your life. High blood pressure, or hypertension, affects 108 million people in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control—that's nearly one-third of the population.

Hypertension causes structural changes of the blood vessels throughout the body, and they can narrow and scar. This results in reduced blood flow to major organs. Having high blood pressure can put you at risk for stroke, heart attack, heart disease, kidney disease, and death.

Thankfully, doctors say there are some lifestyle changes you can make right now to lower your blood pressure and reduce your risk of resulting health problems.

In fact, major health organizations recommend lifestyle modification as the first step in managing hypertension. This includes the Joint National Committee on Prevention, Detection, Evaluation, and Treatment of High Blood Pressure; the American Diabetes Association; and the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association.

Here are lifestyle changes proven to reduce high blood pressure.

1. Adopt a Heart-Healthy Diet

A [2013 study](#) suggests that dietary modification can be a major factor to help bring down high blood pressure. The DASH and Mediterranean diets stand out as the most effective choices.

“The **DASH diet** (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) promotes eating whole grains, fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy products, and limiting saturated fat, cholesterol, sugar, red meat, and salt,” says **Leonard Pianka, M.D.**, a board-certified cardiologist in Miami. DASH is considered a low sodium diet. It includes eating foods that are rich in potassium, calcium, and magnesium, which are known to help lower blood pressure, he says.

The **Mediterranean diet** is a similar approach to eating but with fewer exact guidelines for daily and weekly servings of each food group.

Both diets are considered overall healthy ways to eat, and they may also lead to weight loss, which can help lower blood pressure for many people. The [Framingham Heart Study](#) estimated that excess body weight may be responsible for 26% of cases of hypertension in men and 28% of cases in women.

When you have high blood pressure, it’s very important to watch your sodium intake, which will mean carefully reviewing food labels. Estimated average sodium intake of adults in the U.S. is high—approximately 3,600 mg per day, which far exceeds the recommended limit of 2,300 mg per day set by the United States Dietary Guidelines, and the stricter limit of 1,500 mg per day recommended by the American Heart Association.

Any time you change your diet, it may help to focus on what to add. “If someone increases their intake of potassium, this can, in fact, help to lower their blood pressure,” says **Elizabeth DeRobertis, R.D.**, a registered dietitian in Scarsdale, New York. “And if they do not have enough potassium in their day, it can lead to higher blood pressure.”

High-potassium foods include leafy green vegetables, fish, white beans, avocados, potatoes, acorn squash, milk, mushrooms, bananas, and cooked tomatoes. Some experts suggest people with hypertension should eat at least 4.7 grams of dietary potassium per day to lower blood pressure.

Another potential addition to your diet to lower blood pressure is turmeric, a spice that’s in the ginger family. There have been [several clinical studies](#) showing turmeric to be effective in regulating blood pressure in the body, when taken long-term.

Always consult with a doctor before making dietary changes.

2. Quit Smoking

Smoking is the single greatest preventable cause of disease and death in the U.S., according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). “Nicotine is a stimulant, which damages the blood vessels, decreasing the amount of oxygen the heart receives and increasing your blood pressure,” Pianka explains. “Often, your blood pressure will drop within a short period of time after you quit smoking.”

3. Move More

When you **exercise**, you increase your heart and breathing rates, which doctors say strengthens your heart and reduces pressure on the arteries.

In fact, getting that blood pumping for just 30 minutes, two or three times a week, can reduce your chance of dying from heart disease by 37%, says **Patrick Fratellone, M.D.**, a cardiologist in New York City.

Know that not all exercise is created equal. Fratellone suggests a brisk walk or bike ride for people with high blood pressure. DeRobertis agrees, cautioning that it's important to stick to aerobic exercise and avoid weightlifting, unless you're highly skilled at it or working with a professional trainer.

"Improper form and breathing while lifting heavy weights can put stress on the body that has actually been shown to *increase* blood pressure," DeRobertis explains.

4. Drink Plenty of Water

"If you don't drink enough water, your body will try to stay hydrated by retaining sodium," Pianko says. "The result is increased pressure on your arteries and an increase in your blood pressure."

Talk to your doctor for a personalized recommendation of how much water you should be drinking. "We usually recommend drinking six to eight cups of water per day, depending on your BMI, lifestyle, and other factors," says Pianko. "This will help keep your blood pressure normal and aid with digestion."

5. Get a Stress-Relieving Hobby

Part of hypertension self-care includes managing stress. Fratellone suggests looking at any unhealthy habits or behaviors in your life that might include what he calls "energy thieves." These may include family or **relationship drama**, video game or smartphone addiction, and stress-inducing work habits.

Once you start to become aware of these unhealthy habits, phase them out. Find things you enjoy doing that'll help relieve some stress. "By starting a hobby that brings you calm, serenity, and relaxation, such as yoga, meditation, or even knitting, you'll better combat high blood pressure," Fratellone says.

If you find it **difficult to manage your stress** or to keep your emotions in check, consider working with a therapist.

"By looking at how often you are exhibiting signs of anger and resentment, and by working through those emotions with a psychologist or therapist, you can help keep your blood pressure from skyrocketing," Fratellone says.

Be sure to see your doctor regularly to keep tabs on your blood pressure. They may recommend additional strategies, such as self-monitoring or medication, to help you lower your blood pressure.

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Meditation has been super helpful for me and it's helped to lower my blood pressure. My doctor actually encouraged me to try it out, and it's been a wonderful, life changing experience. After beginning a regular meditation practice, my diet naturally changed too. I found that I was craving more natural, plant foods. I've even learned safe foraging for edible native plants, which is now a new hobby too!

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