

8 Ways to Lower Blood Pressure

Everyone wants to know how to lower blood pressure. Hypertension, or high blood pressure, may be the medical condition patients deny most frequently.

Everyone wants to believe that he or she only suffers from “white coat syndrome”—that is, that their blood pressure is perfect except in the doctor’s office. “The worry makes the reading high!” a typical patient protests. “Otherwise, I’m just fine.”

Doctors used to think the same thing and would pay little attention to slightly elevated blood pressure readings. Now we’ve found that “white coat syndrome” is in fact highly predictive of long-term problems with hypertension.

Once I was among those who denied my own hypertension. My readings were normal or only slightly elevated during my checkups. I had reason to suspect, though, that during my stressful workdays my blood pressure was anything but normal. Still, I let my hypertension go for years without treatment.

I never took my blood pressure seriously until I found myself in the hospital with a “widow-maker lesion” in the left anterior descending artery, which supplies half or more of the blood to the heart’s left ventricle.

The trouble is, a single, isolated reading is an insufficient gauge of a person’s blood pressure. I should have taken the time to keep a blood pressure diary over a two-week period, taking readings morning and night and at odd times as well. That’s the best way to know whether there’s a problem with hypertension. So if you have a problem with hypertension or know someone who does- please take the time to read how to lower blood pressure below, it just may save your life.

Here is my own eight-step plan on how to lower blood pressure:

1. Put down the salt shaker and learn to season your food with herbs and spices. Try curry, fennel, and garlic, for instance. Eat fresh food—real food—as often as possible, not prepackaged food that can sit on a shelf for months or even years and still be “edible.” Salt intake can be balanced, in part, by making sure you have enough magnesium, potassium, and calcium in your diet. These reduce the ill effects of salt. Magnesium dilates, or widens, blood vessels and is used on pregnant women who have high blood pressure. The dosages of these substances, however, are hard to calibrate. Magnesium can be taken until it causes diarrhea, then lower the dose. Calcium and magnesium are best when taken together. Be careful, though, because too much potassium—that is, excessive amounts—can be lethal to your kidneys. All of these substances should be taken in consultation with your doctor.

2. If you want to avoid taking drugs for hypertension or stop taking them, the most significant thing you can do is get down to your ideal body weight. A loss of 10 pounds usually equates to the normal dosage of one medication. Many who suffer from hypertension see this condition completely vanish when they reach their ideal body weight – what you weighed, or close to it, in high school or college. Once again, exercise is crucial. Your cardiovascular system is alive and constantly changing. Exercise builds up the heart in the right way and helps restore elasticity to the arteries. The sequence of putting the cardiovascular system under exercise stress and then taking that stress away brings down blood pressure to what it would be if the person merely rested.

3. Stress reduction is often the key to eliminating hypertension. Exercise is one means of stress reduction. Talking over life’s challenges with one’s family and friends is tremendously helpful and will greatly lower ones stress levels.

4. Stay away from stimulants like coffee, tea, sodas, alcohol, and cigarettes. You simply cannot smoke. Your doctor can advise you as to whether your hypertension warrants cutting out all stimulants, or if you can still enjoy a cup of coffee in the morning. Many people sip diet sodas throughout the day. These have caffeine and can raise blood pressure significantly.

5. Make sure you are getting enough sleep, at least 8 to 10 hours daily. Sleep deprivation is a leading cause of hypertension because it puts the body under stress. If your loved ones complain about snoring or especially snorting and snuffling during the night, you may be suffering from sleep apnea—a rapid cycle of waking up many times at night, periods during which the heart may stop. Sleep apnea puts the body under tremendous stress and causes secondary hypertension.

6. Live below your means so that you are not constantly stressed out about finances. You will find that living below your means translates into lower stress.

7. Don't forget to have fun! Enjoying social times, particularly with people you know well, helps you cope with stress. Keeping a quiet time each day is also very important, whether that means time alone or, much better, in prayer.

8. If you are found to have hypertension and your physician prescribes medication, take it! Take your medication at least until you can change your diet and exercise patterns to achieve an ideal body weight. That will obviate the need, in many cases, for continuing such medication. Many people feel energetic when their blood pressure is high and listless or fatigued when it returns to normal. I try to prescribe medication so that the person's blood pressure returns to normal not all at once but over a short span of time. This allows the person to adjust to what a normal blood pressure feels like. Most people whose hypertension is

treated adequately and with a gentle hand feel much better as a result. Employ every weapon available to win the blood pressure battle!

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