

How To Lower Your Blood Pressure

By Charles Haley

Studies report that about 1 in 3 Americans, or around 65 million of us, suffers from some form of high blood pressure (also called hypertension.) Since high blood pressure is one of the chief precursors of heart attack and stroke, the medical profession is paying more attention than ever to even moderately elevated blood pressure. However, one of the problems with high blood pressure is that in most cases, there's no direct cause doctors can point to and therefore no "magic bullet" to cure it. You can, however, have your blood pressure checked regularly to help manage conditions like diabetes and high cholesterol, which along with high blood pressure vastly increase your risk of heart attack, stroke and kidney failure.

Though there are a variety of drugs that you can take to help control high blood pressure, unless the problem is severe, most doctors will initially recommend lifestyle changes – diet and exercise – to see if you can control your blood pressure on your own – and with the cost of medication these days, it's well worth taking on and meeting the challenge. Obesity can, of course, exacerbate the effects of high blood pressure, and in many cases even a loss of ten percent of your body weight can have some positive effect on your blood pressure readings. If you are overweight and have high blood pressure, losing weight is of course the number one priority and of course second to that is exercise. Daily exercise can not only help lower your blood pressure but help strengthen your heart and circulatory system, as well as help you rid your body of excess salt and fluids. If you are attempting to lower your blood pressure through lifestyle changes alone, remember to set up regular doctors appointments to monitor your progress, and if possible keep a journal of your diet and exercise program, so the doctor can see what you've been eating and doing and make recommendations for increasing the effectiveness of your program.

As part of losing weight, there are also certain things in your diet that can contribute to the negative effects of high blood pressure. Perhaps the most well known of these is salt, and blood pressure patients have often been put on low salt or no salt diets. If you have high blood pressure, even if you're not a salt-a-holic, it's a good idea to reduce your salt intake as much as possible. This is less difficult than you might think; if you follow the theory that basically what you're looking for when you salt your food is an increase in flavor. So try substituting low salt products made up of herbs and spices like Mrs. Dash for salt, as well as reducing the number of salty snacks you consume. Also, if you're the cook in the family, never salt food while cooking – even the water for pasta – but let people add their own salt if they want it. You'll be surprised at how much salt consumption this simple method cuts out.

Another blood pressure killer is cholesterol – in general the “bad” kind that comes from saturated fats, red meats, egg yolks, butter and high fat dairy products, etc. Not only are these things high in calories, but also are high in the LDL or “bad” cholesterol that can collect on the walls of the arteries, restricting blood flow and leading to potential heart attack or stroke. By contrast, HDL cholesterol – the kind of cholesterol found in certain fish oils, etc. – is credited with helping carry away a certain amount of “bad” cholesterol and helping prevent heart attacks. What most people don’t realize is that your body also produces cholesterol, in fact, all the cholesterol your system needs to function, and that’s why eating excess cholesterol – over the 300 mg recommended by the American Heart Association – can be so dangerous to your circulatory health. That’s also why the “Mediterranean diet,” a diet high in olive oil, fish, fruits and vegetables and whole grains – in other words, the good cholesterol and transfatty acids – has been shown to be one which is in general heart healthy. Finally, reducing alcohol consumption and quitting smoking have been shown to help reduce high blood pressure as well as the likelihood of heart attack or stroke.

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