

# Hypertension

By Steve Seater, CNC, CPT  
[www.totalwellnessconcepts.com](http://www.totalwellnessconcepts.com)

Hypertension, or high blood pressure, is a condition usually defined as blood pressure consistently above 140/90, although readings of 120-160/90-94 are considered borderline, and it is observed in more than 60 million Americans. The highest incidence is seen in men and African Americans. In general, moderately high blood pressure is defined as any reading in the following range 140-180/105-114, whereas severe high blood pressure is anything above 160+/115+. Since about 80% of Americans with hypertension fall in the borderline to moderate range, changes in lifestyle and diet can usually control it and prevent it from worsening.

Failure to control hypertension, can lead to premature death from heart attack and stroke. High blood pressure affects the performance of the arteries, which normally expand and contract effortlessly with each heartbeat. Sustained high blood pressure causes the arterial walls to thicken and become inelastic and resistant to blood flow. This condition promotes injury to the arterial lining and accelerates plaque formation. It also causes enlargement of the heart and weakening of the left ventricle. Arterial walls can also balloon, forming aneurysms, which can rupture causing massive internal bleeding and death. High blood pressure also contributes to kidney disease.

## **Major Risk Factors for High Blood Pressure:**

Risk factors include: smoking, excessive consumption of caffeine and alcohol, lack of exercise, obesity, a diet high in sodium and low in potassium, a low fiber, high sugar diet, high intake of saturated fats and low intake of essential fatty acids, and a diet low in calcium magnesium and vitamin C.

Evidence is mounting that commonly prescribed anti-hypertensive drugs do not lower death rates due to high blood pressure and, in fact, may do more harm than good over the long run.

## **Lifestyle Modifications to Prevent or Treat High Blood Pressure:**

The nicotine in tobacco causes blood vessels to constrict and raise blood pressure. Therefore any program to lower blood pressure should begin with smoking cessation. Smoking and heart disease deaths are closely related. Kentucky and Tennessee have the highest rates of smoking in the US and also the highest rate of death from heart disease. Switching to decaffeinated beverages is also recommended and alcohol consumption must be kept to a minimum.

Dietary modification is an effective way to control high blood pressure and should be used to attain ideal body weight. An exercise program should also be initiated to assist in attaining this goal. Furthermore, exercise in and of itself reduces blood pressure and heart

rate by reducing blood levels of two chemicals called epinephrine (adrenaline) and norepinephrine. A regular exercise program reduces risk of stroke by lowering blood pressure and increases peripheral circulation and oxygen delivery. A ten year study of more than 14,000 Norwegian women between 50 and 101 years of age, showed that the risk of dying from stroke declined as physical activity increased. The most active women had about a 50% lower risk of death from stroke across all age groups.

The following foods are recommended: celery ( contains 3-n-butyl phthalide, found to lower blood pressure ); garlic and onions, which lower both blood pressure and cholesterol; nuts and seeds for their essential oils; cold water fish ( salmon, mackerel, etc.); green leafy vegetables for their calcium and magnesium, fresh fruits for their potassium; whole grains and legumes for their fiber; and, broccoli and citrus fruits for their vitamin C.

Stress is also a factor in hypertension. Relaxation techniques are an effective way to reduce blood pressure. Such techniques as meditation, yoga, hypnosis and diaphragm breathing all have promise in reducing stress. Biofeedback has also been shown to be effective.

### **Nutritional and Botanical Supplements:**

Vitamin C lowers blood pressure. Studies have shown that the higher the intake of vitamin C, the lower the blood pressure. Vitamin B6 also lowers blood pressure significantly. Magnesium and calcium supplementation is also advisable since many people with hypertension have low blood levels of these minerals. Coenzyme Q 10, or ubiquinone, also lowers blood pressure and is deficient in 39% of hypertensives. Increasing the intake of omega-3 fatty acids can also lower blood pressure. Taking fish oil capsules or flax seed oil are the best supplements for this purpose. However, flax seed oil may be the best choice when cost benefit is considered.

Several studies have demonstrated that hawthorn extracts are effective in lowering blood pressure and improving heart function. It can take up to four weeks for hawthorn to produce noticeable effects. Garlic supplements are also useful in lowering blood pressure. Aged garlic (7.2 g/day) taken for 10 months has been shown to reduce blood pressure by 3.1%. An extract of mistletoe or *Viscum* is also effective as an antihypertension medication.

The nutritional and botanical supplements mentioned above are available at most health food stores and vitamin shops.

*These nutritional suggestions are not intended to treat or cure disease and or be used as a substitute for sound medical advice. This information should be used in conjunction with the services of a trained, licensed healthcare practitioner. If you are under a doctor's care, seek advice before taking supplements or starting a new exercise program.*

