

## 7 Natural Ways to Lower Blood Pressure

Written by Arizona Foothills Magazine

Friday, 04 May 2012 00:00 - Last Updated Monday, 14 May 2012 09:55

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**There are all kinds of medications for treating high blood pressure, but artificial methods aren't the only way to keep hypertension levels healthier. These seven techniques have all proven effective to help [lower blood pressure](#), and they're easy to incorporate into everyday life.**



### 1. Music and meditation.

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Researchers at the University of Florence studied adults who were already on medication to try breathing slowly

while listening to soothing music for half an hour each day. A week later, average systolic readings were already

3.2 points lower, and dropped by 4.4 points after a month.

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Dr. Robert Schneider, who directs the Center for Natural Medicine and Prevention in Iowa, reports that around 600

studies over the past few decades have linked lower blood pressure to transcendental meditation, "a simple

mind-body technique that allows you to gain a unique state of restful awareness or alertness." Sitting comfortably

with your eyes closed and repeating a mantra, Schneider says, helps you achieve a state of balance that enables

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your body to repair itself.

### 2. Walk, don't work.

When your body uses oxygen more efficiently, your heart has an easier time pumping blood. To improve your

oxygen usage, try to work out vigorously for at least half an hour each day -- speed walking, swimming, Zumba,

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even the treadmill.

Finding that extra 30 minutes in a busy day can be tricky, but one source of extra time might be working fewer

hours. In fact, a study by UC Irvine showed that if you spend more than 41 hours a week at your office, your risk of

high blood pressure rises by 15%.

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However, the Mayo Clinic warns against being a “weekend warrior,” because “Those sudden bursts of activity

could actually be risky.” A better method is to engage in moderate activity daily, for just ten minutes at a time.

### 3. Salt and smoke.

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While a healthy level of salt is less than one teaspoon a day, the amount you sprinkle on food is responsible for

only about 15% of your sodium intake. To keep sodium from affecting your blood pressure, Dr. Eva Obarzanek of

the NHLBI (National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute) recommends avoiding processed foods and using other

seasonings like herbs and lemon.

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Apart from the other risks of smoking, nicotine can raise your blood pressure. It stays high for an hour after you

finish one cigarette, and secondhand smoke has the same effect. But if giving up smoking seems impossible, take

heart: you can always replace the cigarettes with -- yes -- liquor or chocolate.



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### 4. Delicious decadence.

Chocolate lovers, rejoice. According to *Prevention*, one study found that people who ate dark chocolate every day

showed an 18% decrease in blood pressure. Look for dark chocolate with at least 70% cocoa, and enjoy half an

ounce daily -- the flavanols will help increase elasticity in your blood vessels.

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While you're at it, drink a toast to the benefits of wine. A Boston Brigham and Women's Hospital study discovered

that 2-3 ounces of wine (for women, or 5 ounces for men) can actually lower hypertension...even more than

avoiding alcohol altogether. While high levels of alcohol "are clearly detrimental," Dr. Obarzanek says, "moderate

alcohol is protective of the heart."

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### 5. Give yourself a break.

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“When you’re under stress,” says Duke University professor Jim Lane, PhD, “your heart starts pumping a lot more

blood, boosting blood pressure.” One of the best ways to relieve stress is with a massage. Regular [massage](#)

[therapy](#) helps your body maintain a higher level of relaxation...which helps reduce stress, improve sleep and

increase the endorphins that act as a natural mood booster.

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Consider a hot stone massage, which allows your professional therapist to reach deeper layers of muscle. The

soothing warmth of hot stones can actually help expand your blood vessels, encouraging better blood flow

throughout your body.

## 6. Potatoes and potassium.

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If sodium is the Big Bad, potassium is the Great Good. Potassium can help your body eliminate excess sodium,

which is why the NHLBI recommends eating at least 3,500 mg every day.

Dr. Linda Van Horn, professor of preventive medicine at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, lists

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honeydew melon, cantaloupe, orange juice, bananas and raisins as well as kidney beans, tomatoes, peas and

potatoes as good sources of potassium. How about fighting high blood pressure with a bowl of chili, a baked potato

and a fruit plate?

### **7. Tea and tai chi.**

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While debating over whether coffee affects hypertension, researchers generally agree that caffeine may present a

risk. However, a Tufts University study of hibiscus tea showed that people who drank three cups daily actually

lowered their blood pressure by as much as people taking prescription medicine. The phytochemicals in hibiscus

resulted in blood pressure dropping an average of seven points in six weeks.



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Tai chi, yoga and qi gong are known to benefit blood pressure, as well. They help reduce stress hormones, which

are responsible for the kidney enzyme that increases hypertension. So a half hour of tai chi followed by a cup of

hibiscus tea isn't just a pleasant way to spend a morning -- it's actually good for your health!

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[Laurie Schnebly writes for the [Mesa Massage Envy Spa](#), located off the 60 and Dobson. With a master's in

counseling and 11 years as a therapist, she focuses on issues that affect daily life for people who want to improve

their overall health. Take some time to commit to a better balance of health and wellness by scheduling a facial or

massage at one of the [Phoenix Massage Envy](#) area clinics.]