

Healthy Blood Pressure and Chinese Medicine

In Chinese medicine, high blood pressure is diagnosed by the pattern of presentation in each individual. Treatment is a customized approach to the constitution of the person. Chinese medicine practitioners believe that mood, body weight and diet are some of the causative factors behind the patterns of disharmony that accompany high blood pressure. A combination of acupuncture and herbs prescribed for the individual is recommended in addition to the following general preventative recommendations for diet, lifestyle and exercise.

- **Get daily moderate exercise** – Thirty minutes a day of cardio workout — including a brisk walk — can help lower blood pressure. Exercise helps the heart use oxygen more efficiently, so it doesn't work as hard to pump blood.
- **Maintain optimal weight** – Even small amounts of weight loss can improve blood pressure. The greater your body mass, the more pressure there is on your artery walls.
- **Breathe deeply** – Slow breathing and meditative practices such as qigong and taiji decrease stress hormones that raise blood pressure. Inhale deeply and expand your belly. Exhale and release all of your tension.
- **Eat a healthy diet** – Choose whole and unrefined foods such as fresh organic fruits and vegetables. Eat potassium-rich produce — bananas, peas and tomatoes — which helps rid the body of sodium by acting as a diuretic. Cook your food at low temperatures to preserve nutrients. Choose healthy fats and avoid harmful fats. Omega-3 fatty acids reduce inflammation and may help lower the risk of chronic heart disease.
- **Drink 4-8 glasses of water each day** – Drinking water can actually thin the blood, helping the blood pump more smoothly. When the body is dehydrated, the blood becomes acidic which can lead to a build-up in levels of cholesterol.
- **Work smarter, not harder** – Working more than 41 hours per week raises your risk of hypertension by 15 percent. It may be difficult in today's busy times to go on a walk or cook a healthy meal – but taking a break, leaving early or even making your own lunch can make a difference in your well-being.
- **Read food labels to avoid sodium** – Certain groups of people — the elderly, African Americans, and those with a family history of high blood pressure — are more likely than others to have blood pressure that's particularly salt sensitive.
- **Take a supplement** – Antioxidants such as vitamin C and coenzyme Q10 may reduce blood pressure. Take calcium and magnesium, as inadequate intake of both of these minerals has been associated with high blood pressure. The herb hawthorn is often used by traditional Chinese herbal practitioners to aid in the digestion of fats and may have an effect on high blood pressure. These and all supplements should be used under the supervision of a primary care provider.
- **Limit simple sugar, alcohol and caffeine intake** – Studies show that people who consume a diet high in fructose, a type of simple sugar, are more likely to have high blood pressure. Blood pressure increases as your body metabolizes alcohol, another form of sugar. Caffeine can raise blood pressure by constricting blood vessels and by magnifying the effects of stress.



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