

Garlic in the Treatment of High Blood Pressure

High blood pressure, also called hypertension, is a condition in which the pressure inside your blood vessels is higher than normal. Every day, your blood pressure varies slightly due to stress, exercise, drinking caffeine or alcohol, smoking cigarettes, or even standing up or sitting down. But when blood pressure is higher than it should be and stays elevated, you are at risk of having a stroke, a heart attack, kidney disease, or heart failure.



LIFESTYLE CHANGES KNOWN TO LOWER BLOOD PRESSURE

1. Lose weight. Every 2.2 pounds of weight loss can lower your blood pressure by 1 mm Hg.
2. Eat a diet rich in fresh fruits and vegetables, low in fat, and high in dairy products. Eating healthy can lower your blood pressure by 8–14 mm Hg.
3. Reduce the sodium (salt) in your diet. Eating less than 2.4 gm sodium each day can lower your blood pressure by 2–8 mm Hg. This is especially useful for older women, whose blood pressure tends to be salt-sensitive.
4. Exercise for 30 minutes per day most days of the week. Regular physical activity can lower blood pressure by 4–9 mm Hg. (Walking also sharpens mental skills in the elderly.)
5. Limit your consumption of alcohol. This can lower your blood pressure by 2–4 mm Hg. Men should have less than 2 drinks per day; women should have less than 1 drink per day.
6. Stop smoking. This can lower your blood pressure and protect you from many other types of diseases.

When your blood pressure is measured, it is reported as a pair of numbers: a high number (systolic) over a low number (diastolic). The high number is the pressure in your blood vessels when your heart beats, and the low number is the pressure when your heart relaxes between beats. Normal blood pressure is considered 120/80 mm Hg or lower.

High blood pressure is diagnosed when a person has had several blood pressure readings greater than 140/90 mm Hg. To lower blood pressure, people can make lifestyle changes (see Box) or take medications, if needed. Some dietary supplements, including garlic, also claim to reduce blood pressure. Do garlic supplements really work?

Researchers recently examined data from several small studies to determine whether garlic is truly effective for blood pressure control. In 3 studies from the 1990s, involving a total of just 139 individuals with high blood pressure, results showed that taking 600–900 mg of garlic each day lowered blood pressure by an average of 16/9 mm Hg. That reduction is comparable to what would be expected with some prescription blood pressure medications. However, the prescription

Based on “Effects of Garlic on Blood Pressure in Patients With and Without Systolic Hypertension: A Meta-Analysis” by Kurt M Reinhart, Craig I Coleman, Colleen Teevan, Payal Vachhani, and C Michael White, *The Annals of Pharmacotherapy*, December 2008, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1345/aph.1L319>. For Our Patients is provided by *The Annals* to help explain the latest research and information relating to your medications. These summaries are for informational purposes only and are not a substitute for professional advice from your personal medical provider. If you have questions about this material, you should discuss it with your physician or pharmacist. This summary may be reproduced without permission for not-for-profit educational purposes only. Any other use must be approved by the publisher. © Copyright 2008, Harvey Whitney Books Company, www.hwbooks.com.

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drugs also offer protection from stroke, kidney disease, and heart attacks, and so far there is no evidence that garlic provides the same benefits. Interestingly, garlic supplements in doses ranging from as little as 4 mg to as much as 2.4 grams do not lower blood pressure in people without high blood pressure.

While garlic might be an option for some people, it should not be used by everyone. Garlic may increase the risk of bleeding in people who take aspirin or “blood-thinners” like warfarin (Coumadin). Supplements containing garlic may also cause bad breath or body odors. In addition, because natural medicines are not subjected to the rigorous evaluation process that the Food and Drug Administration requires for drugs, different garlic products can vary. The 3 studies that reported garlic’s beneficial effects on blood pressure all used the same garlic product and were sponsored by the same manufacturer, so these studies may be biased.

To summarize, garlic supplements may help some people lower their blood pressure. However, lifestyle changes may be at least as effective. More studies, with larger numbers of people, are needed to thoroughly assess the risks and benefits of garlic. If you are thinking about taking garlic supplements to lower your blood pressure, talk to your doctor first. Together you can decide how best to lower your blood pressure.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

American Heart Association
www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=2114

Medline Plus
www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/highbloodpressure.html

National Center for Complementary and Alternative
Medicine
<http://nccam.nih.gov/health/garlic/index.htm>