

## **Natural Supplements to Help Lower Blood Pressure**

Many physicians are now recommending a change in diet along with medication to help with the treatment and prevention of disease. If a patient is prehypertensive or would like to use additional alternative methods to control blood pressure aside from prescription medication, natural foods and supplements can help. One such natural supplement is garlic. Although research has shown statistically significant results for lowering blood pressure using garlic, scientists still argue over whether or not it should be used for hypertensive patients. Garlic can thin the blood, like an anticoagulant, and because of this, it should not be combined with other blood thinners such as warfarin (coumadin), aspirin, Trental (pentoxifylline), vitamin E or ginkgo. Research has also uncovered that garlic can lower cholesterol, which can help to relieve strain on the blood vessels.<sup>1</sup>

Scientists report that diet may play a role in hypertension. Excess sodium, caffeine and alcohol can contribute to high blood pressure. A diet low in calcium, potassium and magnesium may be to blame as well because they balance sodium levels in the body. Insulin resistance due to high blood sugar may cause hypertension by causing the kidneys to retain sodium. Foods containing licorice root, ephedra, guarana, kola nut, yerba mate, ginseng and yohimbe can also raise blood pressure. To counteract hypertension with diet, patients should read the nutritional facts on everything and avoid processed foods (because they tend to be high in sodium), the herbs previously mentioned, and caffeinated

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<sup>1</sup> Wong, 2011

beverages. Also, increasing calcium, potassium and magnesium in the diet will lower sodium levels.<sup>2</sup>

Research has determined that folate (or folic acid), a B-vitamin, may help to lower blood pressure. Scientists believe that folate helps by lowering homocysteine levels. Naturally, folate is found in leafy green vegetables such as spinach, broccoli, asparagus, romaine lettuce, and turnip greens. It is also found in fruits and dried beans such as black-eyed peas, avocado, great northern beans, green peas, tomatoes, oranges, cantaloupe, bananas, and papayas.<sup>34</sup> Co-enzyme Q10, or ubiquinone, has been found to aid in naturally lowering blood pressure as well. It is found in cold-water fish such as sardines, salmon, and mackerel, which also contains heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids. It is also found in broccoli, spinach, peanuts, pistachio nuts, roasted sesame seeds, beef and chicken. Co-enzyme Q10 is oil-soluble and so it is best taken with oily foods (such as nuts and fish). Frying reduces the amount that can be absorbed by the body so the best way to prepare the vegetables is by boiling.<sup>56</sup>

Berries, such as blueberries, as well as raspberries and strawberries, contain natural compounds called anthocyanins that protect against hypertension.<sup>7</sup> Anthocyanins are a group of bioflavonoids, which are phytochemicals found in teas, wines, fruits, vegetables, olive oil, honey, cocoa, nuts, and cereals that have been found to play a role in prevention of many human diseases.<sup>8</sup> Dark chocolate is high in flavonoids which naturally dilate blood

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<sup>2</sup> Weil, M.D., 2011

<sup>3</sup> "Dietary supplement fact," 2009

<sup>4</sup> Wong, 2011

<sup>5</sup> Horton, 2009

<sup>6</sup> Wong, 2011

<sup>7</sup> Sagon, 2011

<sup>8</sup> Lila, 2004

vessels to reduce pressure. The higher the percent of cacao, the more beneficial it is.

Turmeric, the active compound in Indian curry, contains resveratrol, the same substance in red wine which lowers blood pressure. Curry contains the beneficial compound of red wine without the negative effects of alcohol.<sup>9</sup>

Studies have found that high fiber diets help to reduce hypertension.

Whole-grain, high-fiber cereals like oatmeal, oat squares, bran flakes or shredded wheat, can reduce the risk of high blood pressure. Baked potato can also be beneficial because it is high in potassium and magnesium, two of the aforementioned important minerals that can help reduce high blood pressure. Other foods rich in these nutrients are bananas, halibut, kidney beans, spinach, soybeans, and plain nonfat yogurt.<sup>10</sup>

Foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids are also essential. Cold-water wild-caught fish such as Alaskan salmon and sardines. Omega-3 supplement can also be used.<sup>11</sup> Links have been found between high-fat diets and hypertension so experts suggest that fatty products such as margarine, oil, shortening, butter, and salad dressings should be avoided. Certain foods are also thought to contribute to hypertension and intake should be reduced as much as possible. These foods include fatty meats such as beef and pork, whole milk dairy products, fast food and fried foods, salty snacks, canned or condensed soups, and deli meats.<sup>12</sup> Alternatively, Traditional Chinese Medicine recommends honey, water chestnut, Chinese celery, turnip, hawthorn berries, and mung beans.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The Cleveland Clinic, 2010

<sup>10</sup> Sagon, 2011

<sup>11</sup> Weil, M.D., 2011

<sup>12</sup> The Cleveland Clinic, 2010

<sup>13</sup> Wong, 2011

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