

# Alternative Treatments for High Blood Pressure

*Research shows that some relaxation techniques, herbs, and supplements can work when used with conventional treatments for high blood pressure.*

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High blood pressure is a common condition that can significantly increase your risk of **heart disease** and **stroke**. Because high blood pressure, or **hypertension**, affects so many people, **prescription medications** have been developed to treat it. Additionally, there are a number of complementary and alternative therapies that can help lower high blood pressure.

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“Some natural medicines and alternative therapies have [been] shown in studies to reduce blood pressure slightly, by 3 to 6 millimeters of mercury (mm Hg),” notes Heather Zwickey, PhD, director of the Helfgott Research Institute in Portland, Ore. “It’s not huge, which means if you’re on medication you want to stay on it, but many alternative therapies for blood pressure are safe and may do some good,” she says.

## **Alternative Treatment: Stress Reduction and Breathing Techniques**

Many people find their blood pressure rises when they experience emotional stress. Therefore, managing stress can help you keep your blood pressure in check and may even reduce it. Some stress reduction techniques effective for lowering high blood pressure include these methods:

- **Qigong.** A combination of deep breathing and movement that promotes relaxation.
- **Tai chi.** A popular method of relaxation and fitness, tai chi uses gentle, flowing exercises and stretching movements.

## **Alternative Treatment: Acupuncture**

Of three recent studies on the effect of acupuncture on hypertension, two showed that **acupuncture** may lower blood pressure. Zwickey notes that more research is needed to explore the use of acupuncture for hypertension, but it does not appear to be harmful. If you are interested in trying acupuncture to help control your blood pressure, be sure to go to a licensed acupuncture practitioner.

## Talk to Your Doctor about Alternative Treatment

National guidelines don't recommend that patients use alternative therapies to lower their blood pressure, notes Daniel Jones, MD, dean of the school of medicine at the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson, Miss., and past president of the American Heart Association. He does admit, however, that "when patients come to me and want to use some of these alternative therapies, I am pleased that they want to do things to control their blood pressure. I talk to them about what they may want to do. If it is a herb or a supplement, I ask that they review it with a pharmacist just to be sure it would not interfere with their medications. It's fine to include alternative therapies in your treatment as long as you talk with your doctor and he knows what you are doing."

The best natural approach to controlling blood pressure is to minimize stress and take good care of yourself, Novey says. Eat a well-balanced, **low-salt diet** with plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Also be certain to get enough rest and regular exercise, and maintain a healthy weight. If you do