6 Easy Ways to Lower Your Blood Pressure

by PATRICIA BRATIANU

Lowering Your Blood Pressure Naturally

If you have atrial fibrillation you already have one of the risk factors for cardiac disease and stroke, so it's important to decrease other risk factors, including high blood pressure.

While high blood pressure, also known as hypertension, is often managed with medications it is healthier for you to reduce blood pressure by natural means.

You can use these natural methods regardless or not you're taking medications to fight hypertension. However, if are taking pharmaceuticals be sure to consult with a qualified health care provider.

Improve Your Diet

Losing excess weight is one of the most important things you can do to lower your blood pressure.

Lose weight by eating well and exercising more. A heart healthy diet is beneficial for your entire body, and everyone in the family will benefit from eating a low fat, high fiber diet that is rich in fruit, vegetables and whole grains. These plant-based foods are packed with vitamins, minerals, fiber, enzymes and compounds that reduce blood pressure, prevent aging and enhance the health of your entire body. They are low in calories and provide good quality carbohydrates.

Consider the following tips for your diet:

- Obtain most of your protein from plant sources. Dried beans and peas are excellent options, as they are rich in vitamins, minerals, protein and fiber, and will fill you up. Legumes are fat free and inexpensive. Eat them a couple of times each day.
- If you choose to eat meat, consume cold-water fish such as salmon, mackerel and herring. In addition to protein, these fish contain heart protective oils.
- Eat lean meats no more than a few times weekly. Avoid processed and fatty meats. Keep in mind that a serving of meat is the size of a deck of cards.
- You can obtain protein from dairy products. Choose low fat varieties of yogurt and cheese, keeping in mind hard cheeses generally contain less fat than soft cheeses. Pay attention to portion sizes. A one-ounce portion of cheese is equal to a block that measures one inch square.
- Avoid saturated fats and opt for healthier olive, canola or nut oils instead. Flax, hazelnut and walnut oils contain compounds that help to reduce high blood pressure. One tablespoonful of oil contains about 100 calories.

- Limit your intake of processed foods, which contain empty calories, unhealthy preservatives and other additives. If you use sweeteners, I recommend the use of small amounts of stevia, honey, or maple syrup over artificial ones. Artificial foods increase inflammation throughout your body. Inflammation is linked with

high blood pressure and a wide array of other deleterious conditions.
- Limit your intake of salt. Salt makes your body retain fluid and increases your blood pressure. Read packaged food labels carefully as they often contain large amounts of salt.
- Keep alcohol intake to a minimum. While a glass of red wine does offer cardio protective benefits, too much alcohol stresses the body. Alcoholic beverages provide empty calories and excessive drinking stresses the entire body, harming the liver and consequently increasing blood pressure. Do not drink more than two servings of alcohol daily.

Next page: herbs and exercise.

Try Herbs

You may choose to use herbal remedies to manage your blood pressure. These three are good options:

- **Hawthorn –**Hawthorn improves circulation within your heart. It normalizes cardiac function and helps your blood vessels to relax, thereby decreasing blood pressure.
- **Dandelion leaf –** Dandelion can be consumed in the diet as a food or a tea. Dandelion is a diuretic, so it the body of excess fluid. It works in a similar way to pharmaceutical diuretics. However, unlike drugs for high blood pressure, dandelion does not deplete the body of potassium.
- **Olive leaf –** Olive leaf is another herb that causes blood vessels to relax. It is rich in healthy antioxidants that benefit the entire body.

Get Moving

Movement is essential for weight loss. In addition to helping you to lose weight, exercise makes your entire body healthier. It reduces inflammation, relieves stress and helps your body to utilize nutrients better.

Even if you exercise for a just few minutes each day, your body will continue to burn off excess calories at a faster rate than if you do not exercise. Check with your health care provider prior to beginning an exercise program. Be sure to stay hydrated during and after exercising.

Quit Smoking

The use of tobacco increases your blood pressure by several means. Firstly, it is a stimulant and causes your blood vessels to constrict and become less flexible. Additionally, when you smoke tobacco particles deposit in your airways. This results in pressure building up in the blood vessels of your chest, neck and heart.

Even if you have tried to quit before and failed, give it another try. Smoking cessation is important for your entire body.

Reduce and Manage Stress

Stress may cause you to go into atrial fibrillation. It also causes your blood pressure to rise. Consider these tips for reducing and better managing stress:

- Pay attention to stressors. Look at each stressor individually. Is the stressor something or that you can remove from your life? Can the situation be modified? Do you need to adjust how you react to a certain individual or stressor?
- There are many things you can do to reduce the stressors in your life. Consider taking actions which help you to manage time better. Do you need to improve your organizational skills? Counselling, spiritual guidance, yoga and meditation can all help reduce and manage stress, too. Sometimes all that is required is a deep breath, some time out or a good night’s sleep.
- Be aware of how you spend the minutes of your day. One of the most important questions that I ask

myself when I feel stressed is, “How important is it?” While my initial thought may be that the project or situation is very important, when I take a second look I realize that in the grand scheme of things the stressor is actually minor.
- Do one thing at a time. While many consider multitasking a skill, health experts realize that it’s not good for us. It causes stress and a lack of concentration, and can contribute to an increase of blood pressure. Leading health experts conclude that our bodies were never designed to multitask. Allow yourself to concentrate fully on the task before you and let go of other activities.

Take a Break

Large corporations are now requiring workers to take their vacation time. Many employees have been in the habit of saving time off or cashing it in, but corporate leaders now realize that workers need vacation time in order to reduce levels of stress and increase productivity.

This thinking applies to everyone, whether employed or not. We all need to take time out in order to reduce stress and regroup. It doesn’t mean that we need to take long vacations, but it does mean that we need to make indulging in periods of restoration a priority.

Relaxation will lower your blood pressure, energize, you, and help you to stay focused on living well. You will be able to concentrate on the steps which you need to stay well despite having a diagnosis of atrial fibrillation. You will be more motivated to eat well, exercise, quit smoking, engage in healthy activities, and simply relax. All of these activities will reduce your blood pressure, lessen your chances of heart disease, and lower your risk of stroke.