



# FOOD



## THE BLOOD PRESSURE SOLUTION

By Dr. Mark Hyman



**DISCLAIMER:** The content of this book is based on research conducted by Hyman Enterprises, LLC, unless otherwise noted. The information is presented for educational purposes only and is not intended to diagnose or prescribe for any medical or psychological condition, nor to prevent, treat, mitigate or cure such conditions. The information contained herein is not intended to replace a one-on-one relationship with a doctor or qualified healthcare professional. Therefore, this information is not intended as medical advice, but rather a sharing of knowledge and information based on research and experience. Hyman Enterprises, LLC encourages you to make your own health care decisions based on your judgment and research in partnership with a qualified healthcare professional.

Please do not stop, adjust, or modify your dose of any prescribed medications without the direct supervision of your healthcare practitioner.

These statements have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration.  
The information in this book is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease.

# THE BLOOD PRESSURE SOLUTION

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>THE PROBLEM</b> .....	3-4
The Problem with Our Approach to High Blood Pressure .....	3
A Different Perspective to Treat High Blood Pressure .....	4
<b>THE SOLUTION</b> .....	5-12
What about Salt? .....	5
General Dietary Recommendations to Help Lower Blood Pressure .....	7-12
- The 10-Day Detox Diet .....	7
- Supplements .....	9
- Exercise .....	10
- Reduce Stress .....	10
- Sleep .....	10
<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	13

# THE BLOOD PRESSURE SOLUTION: THE PROBLEM

High blood pressure—medically known as hypertension—affects about 30 percent of adults. If untreated, it increases your risks for heart disease, stroke, kidney disease, and dementia. Often the cause of high blood pressure is due to many factors, including a combination of diet and lifestyle factors.

In his book *What Your Doctor Might Not Tell You About: Hypertension*, Mark Houston, MD, says hypertension is the third leading cause of death in the country. The higher your blood pressure, the lower your life expectancy.

Unfortunately, high blood pressure is a silent killer. Left neglected, it can severely damage your quality of life and set the stage for heart disease, kidney complications, or a stroke.

When you have healthy arteries, blood flows freely to your brain, heart, lungs, and other organs, delivering nutrients and oxygen. High blood pressure means increased blood flow or pressure, creating arterial damage and restricting blood flow to vital organs.

About 60 percent of Americans with hypertension are overweight (<https://stateofobesity.org/hypertension/>), but losing 10 or 20 pounds can normalize blood pressure. Conversely, a number of things, including ibuprofen, contraceptives, and over-the-counter and prescription drugs can all elevate blood pressure.

## THE PROBLEM WITH OUR APPROACH TO HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

---

Our current thinking about how to treat and prevent high blood pressure is at best misguided, and at worst harmful. Rather than using medication and other invasive measures, the real question becomes what causes high blood pressure in the first place.

If you say your genes are responsible for high blood pressure, you are mostly wrong. It is the environment working on your genes that determines your risk. In other words, it is the way you eat, how much you exercise, how you deal with stress, and the effects of environmental toxins that are the underlying causes of high blood pressure.

According to Houston, while physicians carefully monitor blood pressure, they often resort to anti-hypertensive medications when it becomes too high. Sadly, these drugs are not that successful, and well over half of those who have hypertension are not treated adequately. “Of the more than 50 million hypertensive Americans,” Houston says, “fewer than 14 million have it under control.”

## A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE TO TREAT HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

---

While physicians resort to medications to treat high blood pressure, they overlook the most effective drug of all: food. The right foods and nutrients can dramatically lower blood pressure without the high costs and side effects of medications.

Lifestyle factors can also contribute to or exacerbate high blood pressure. Chronic stress alone can cause a heart attack. It is often the trigger that leads to the cascade of events that causes that final, fatal heart attack. But all along the way, it contributes to high blood pressure by creating inflammation, raising your cholesterol and blood sugar, and even making your blood more likely to clot.

# THE BLOOD PRESSURE SOLUTION: THE SOLUTION

Fortunately, a number of natural strategies can help normalize blood pressure without prescription drugs or other invasive measures. Among those strategies include the whole-foods diet, targeted supplementation, exercise, and stress management, which I'll talk about here.

All are critical for maintaining a healthy weight, which is especially key to normalizing blood pressure levels.

These strategies also help to control insulin levels. Elevated insulin levels lead, directly or indirectly, to other metabolic abnormalities, including hypertension, low HDL ("good") cholesterol, high LDL ("bad") cholesterol, high triglycerides, obesity, inflammation, and abnormal blood clotting. Individuals with such symptoms are at increased risk of coronary heart disease, as well as other diseases related to plaque buildups in artery walls, such as stroke.

In *Food: What the Heck Should I Eat?*, I provide information about my 10-Day Detox Diet that I'll also discuss here. This plan works so well that your blood pressure can drop dramatically in just a day or two.

One caveat: If you are on medication, you must carefully monitor your blood pressure and reduce your dose of medication in partnership with your doctor to make sure you don't get into trouble.

Having your blood pressure run a little high for a week poses almost no danger (if your blood pressure is under 150/100), but rapid drops in blood pressure can become life-threatening. Please be sure to talk with your health care provider before embarking on this journey.

## WHAT ABOUT SALT?

---

You can't mention high blood pressure without discussing salt. Once, salt was a rare, highly prized substance. Today it's everywhere. That's where the problem begins.

Salt, or sodium, as we all know, has been linked to hypertension, the precursor to death due to heart disease and stroke, but only in a subset of people who are genetically salt-sensitive. Sodium is important for overall health, but our sodium levels needs to be in proportion to our levels of other important minerals—mainly, potassium.

When the ratio of sodium to potassium in our bodies gets out of whack, high blood pressure follows. So, we need optimal amounts of both to stay healthy.

The best source of potassium is whole, unprocessed, plant-based foods like cooked spinach, broccoli, squash, avocados, papayas, and bananas (though we shouldn't overeat the latter two). If you're diagnosed with high blood pressure, you'll be instructed to eliminate sodium from your diet as much as possible. But this isn't great advice.

In fact, patients with heart failure who ate a salt-restricted diet were 85 percent more likely to die or be hospitalized than patients who didn't limit their salt intake. There are some people with high blood pressure who are salt-sensitive. But even then, the research doesn't show much benefit to restricting salt.

# THE BLOOD PRESSURE SOLUTION: THE SOLUTION

The trick, as we've seen time and time again, is to avoid the refined salts ubiquitous in processed foods and eat the whole, unprocessed foods I talk about in *Food: What the Heck Should I Eat?*

Sodium is naturally found in whole foods, and, as with any other food or mineral, it's best in its purest form. Look for these foods that are rich in natural sodium to get your recommended daily allowance of about 2,300 milligrams. They include meat, beets, carrots, and beans.

When it comes to seasoning, be sure to choose unrefined varieties of salt. I prefer Himalayan pink salt, which is as beautiful as it sounds, as well as kosher and sea salt in moderation. We can safely add these to our food, as long as our diet is also rich in potassium.

And here's a tip: If you use amazing, potent spices and herbs like turmeric and rosemary, you really won't need to add much salt to make your meals taste great. Also, if you add salt to your dishes after you've finished cooking them, flavor-wise you'll get more bang for your buck.

Now, none of this means you can eat as much salty food as you want. You absolutely can be harmed by too much sodium. Although we have an unfairly negative view of salt as bad, emerging science has disproven the "salt is bad for you" mantra. The highly refined salt that food manufacturers add to processed and packaged foods is killing us.

Again, it is not the salt you add to your food, but the salt added by food corporations. Refined salt has been stripped of any beneficial trace minerals (found in sea salt or other forms of salt such as Himalayan salt) and is there purely to mask the unpleasant tastes of the processed food and nasty ingredients.

You should also watch for refined salt that's been "iodized," or supplemented with iodine. Iodized salt was introduced in the mid-1920s to supplement iodine-poor diets that were causing goiters. But today, if you are eating enough real food that is rich in iodine—like fish, shellfish, and seaweed—then you really don't need to get iodine from salt. Not enough iodine can cause thyroid dysfunction, but so can too much. So, I recommend staying away from iodized salt when possible. Morton's iodized salt also contains sugar in the form of dextrose.

Go through the supermarket shelves and look for it on the labels—sodium is everywhere, including many places it doesn't need to be. Use salt in its most natural form. It's that simple.

## GENERAL DIETARY RECOMMENDATIONS TO HELP LOWER BLOOD PRESSURE

### THE 10-DAY DETOX DIET

---

Foremost to normalizing blood pressure is to eat a healthy diet. Most important is to increase your consumption of whole foods rich in phytonutrients, plant molecules that give your body the nutrients it needs.

The first step to curb inflammation, normalize blood pressure, and feel better is to eliminate the junk. It's simple. First, you stop eating certain addictive and inflammatory foods for 10 days, and then, after 10 days, you'll have the opportunity to add some of these foods back in to see how your body responds.

Eliminating inflammatory and toxic foods is just part of the 10-Day Detox Diet. The other part involves adding in the good stuff—real, whole foods that nourish your body with every single bite. We all know that food can harm us, but we should all take advantage of the fact that food can heal us, too.

**Here are some ways you will automatically improve your blood pressure just by following the 10-Day Detox Diet:**

- **Eat a plant-based diet,** and be sure to include potassium-rich foods. Eat a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds high in fiber, healthy fats, and nutrients such as calcium, magnesium, and the all-important potassium. Potassium helps our bodies eliminate excess sodium and relax blood vessel walls, both of which help lower blood pressure. The Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA) for potassium is 4,700 mg per day, but most people get only about half this amount in their diet. Choose from these foods to increase your daily intake: Swiss chard, spinach, kale, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, crimini mushrooms, tomato, green beans, and avocado.
- **Don't eat carbohydrates alone.** Combine protein, fat, and carbohydrates in every meal.
- **Pull the sugar.** A diet full of empty calories and quickly absorbed sugar, liquid sugar calories, and refined carbohydrates—all of which convert to sugar—creates high insulin levels, eventually leading to insulin resistance and type 2 diabetes. Chronically high insulin levels lead to many problems, including inflammation, high blood pressure, poor sex drive, increased risk for cancer, and depression. The most important thing you can do to reduce your risk of type 2 diabetes and obesity or reverse its impact is to eliminate or dramatically reduce sugar in all its many disguises.
- **Eat fat.** Use ONLY good, healthy fats and clean (grass-fed or sustainably raised) animal foods. You should include fat at each meal. The best sources are avocados, extra-virgin olive oil, nuts and seeds, extra-virgin coconut butter, organic full-fat coconut milk, whole organic eggs, fatty fish (sardines, wild salmon, mackerel, or herring), grass-fed lamb, bison, or beef, or organic poultry.



# THE BLOOD PRESSURE SOLUTION: THE SOLUTION

- **Stock up on real foods.** Whole, unprocessed real foods balance your blood sugar, reduce inflammation and oxidative stress, and improve your liver detoxification to prevent or reverse insulin resistance and diabetes. Whole, real foods turn on all the right gene messages, promote a healthy metabolism, reverse insulin resistance and diabetes, and prevent aging and age-related diseases like diabetes and heart disease.
- **Eat about 4 to 6 ounces of protein with each meal.** If you make a fist, that's approximately the portion size we're talking about per meal.
- **Avoid all gluten and dairy.**
- **Avoid all processed junk food,** including sodas, juices, and diet drinks, which impact sugar and lipid metabolism. Liquid sugar calories are the biggest contributors to obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.
- **Eliminate all hydrogenated fat,** which is found in margarine, shortening, and processed oils, as well as many baked goods and processed foods.
- **Eat only fat, protein, and veggies for breakfast.** You can choose from a variety of protein shakes or delicious egg recipes (omega-3 eggs are ideal) to wake up your metabolism first thing in the morning.
- **Include flaxseeds** by adding two to four tablespoons of ground flaxseeds every day to your food. Flax is tasty in shakes or sprinkled on salads.
- **Avoid beans and grains,** both can spike your blood sugar.
- **Limit alcohol consumption.** Drinking too much alcohol can increase blood pressure and interfere with good health. Researchers estimate heavy drinking is responsible for about 8 percent of all cases of high blood pressure in the U.S. Alcohol also impacts triglycerides and creates blood sugar imbalances. For men, limit alcohol to no more than two drinks per day. For women, limit alcohol to no more than one drink per day. (One drink is defined as a 12-ounce beer, a 5-ounce glass of wine, or a 1.5-ounce shot of liquor.)
- **Drink a minimum of eight glasses of pure, clean water** throughout the day.
- **Eat the rainbow.** Eat at least eight to 10 servings of vegetables every day, which contain disease-fighting vitamins, minerals, fiber, phytonutrients, antioxidants, and anti-inflammatory molecules.
- **Use high-quality Himalayan or sea salt,** because when you cut down carbs your body needs more salt.
- **Try not to eat three hours before bed.**

Eating a clean diet is one of the best ways to heal the body AND to figure out what foods might be triggering your high blood pressure. When you do the 10-Day Detox Diet, you will automatically eliminate those allergies and sensitivities and be able to see how your body reacts.

# THE BLOOD PRESSURE SOLUTION: THE SOLUTION

I've provided more details about the 10-Day Detox Diet and how to re-introduce foods to maintain that plan for life in *Food: What the Heck Do I Eat?*

This book is founded on the principle that food is medicine. It is information. Food literally controls almost every function of your body and mind. And it connects almost everything that matters in our lives.

Food connects us to one another and to our bodies; it can reinvigorate our health, bring families together, restore vibrant communities, improve the economy and the environment, reduce pollution, and help our kids get better grades and avoid eating disorders, obesity, and drug abuse; food can even reduce poverty, violence, homicide, and suicide.

I wrote *Food* as a roadmap, based on the best and latest science of what to eat, to dispel the confusion and contention that keeps you overweight, sick, and unhappy.

What you put on your fork is the most important thing you do every day. It influences your capacity to live a rich, energetic, connected, soulful life—a life in which you have the energy to care for yourself, to love your friends and family, to help your neighbor, to fully show up for your work in the world, and to live your dreams.

If you enjoy real, whole, fresh foods that you cook using real ingredients, you are positively affecting everything around you.

## SUPPLEMENTS

---

Supplements are important for normalizing blood pressure. Along with a healthy diet and exercise program, they can dramatically improve your blood pressure. Here are the supplements I have found most useful in my practice.

I have sourced the highest-quality supplements that are tested for purity and potency and are all absorbable and free of contaminants and allergens. You can get these all online in my [Blood Pressure Kit](https://store.drhyman.com) on [store.drhyman.com](https://store.drhyman.com).

- **Metabolic Synergy** multivitamin (3 twice a day)
- **Magnesium Citrate** (1 twice a day)
- **CoQ10 100** mg (1 a day)
- **K+2 Potassium** (1 twice a day)
- **OmegaGenics EPA-DHA 2400 fish oil** (1 twice a day)
- **Homocysteine Supreme** (2 a day)
- **PGX** (3 to 6 capsules or 2.5 to 5 grams of powder before each meal with a cold glass of water)

## EXERCISE

---

Regular physical activity strengthens your heart, enabling it to pump more blood with less effort. Less force required to pump blood means less force on artery walls. Physical activity will also promote weight loss, increase energy and mood, and reduce cholesterol.

I encourage 30 to 45 minutes of cardiovascular exercise at least six times a week. You may try interval training if you are feeling stronger. I also encourage strength training to build muscle and reduce body fat composition.

Exercise is not a luxury. It's a necessity when it comes to preventing almost all chronic disease, from heart disease to cancer, from dementia to diabetes, from osteoporosis to osteoarthritis. You cannot age successfully without it. It is simply how we are designed.

## REDUCE STRESS

---

Finding ways to manage stress, make time for relaxation, and hit your pause button is essential for dealing with nearly all chronic health conditions, including high blood pressure.

Stress alone can cause many chronic diseases. Take a heart attack. Stress often triggers a cascade of events that cause a heart attack by creating inflammation, causing high blood pressure, and even making your blood more likely to clot.

Learn to reduce stress by doing regular relaxation exercises such as yoga, tai chi, meditation, breathing, guided imagery, or whatever it takes to engage your parasympathetic nervous system. This lowers blood pressure, reduces your overall level of inflammation, increases metabolism, and helps with your overall health.

Try classes, buy CDs (you can try my [UltraCalm audio program](#)), try therapy, or just go out and have fun. Do whatever it takes to relax on a daily basis and maintain your health.

## SLEEP

---

I used to think that “MD” stood for “medical deity” and meant I didn't have to follow the same sleep rules as every other human being. I stayed up late working long shifts in the emergency room, ignoring the demands of my body. It wasn't until I learned that shift work leads to a shortened life expectancy that I quit.

Unfortunately, our lives are infiltrated with constant stimuli that keep us revved up until the moment we go to bed. It's no wonder so many of us have trouble getting restful sleep.

# THE BLOOD PRESSURE SOLUTION: THE SOLUTION

Instead of pushing through until your head hits the pillow, try to take a little “holiday” in the two hours before bed. Create a sleep ritual—a special set of little things you do before bed—in order to guide your body into a deep, healing sleep.

**Here are some tips on how to restore your natural sleep rhythm. It may take weeks or months, but using these tools in a coordinated way will eventually reset your biological rhythms:**

- **Practice the regular rhythms of sleep.** Go to bed and wake up at the same time each day.
- **Use your bed for sleep and romance only,** not for television or even reading.
- **Create an aesthetic environment that encourages sleep.** Use serene and restful colors and eliminate clutter and distraction.
- **Create total darkness and quiet.** Consider using eyeshades and earplugs.
- **Avoid caffeine.**
- **Avoid alcohol.** It may help you get to sleep initially, but it causes interruptions throughout the night, resulting in poor-quality sleep.
- **Get at least 20-minutes exposure to daylight daily.** The light from the sun enters your eyes and triggers your brain to release specific chemicals and hormones like melatonin that are vital to healthy sleep, mood, and aging.
- **Eat no later than three hours before bed.** Eating a heavy meal prior to bed will lead to a bad night's sleep.
- **Don't exercise vigorously after dinner.** It excites the body and makes it more difficult to get to sleep.
- **Write your worries down.** One hour before bed, write down the things that are causing you anxiety and make your to-do list for the next day to reduce your worry. It will free up your mind and energy to move into deep and restful sleep.
- **Take a hot salt/soda aromatherapy bath.** Raising your body temperature before bed helps to induce sleep. A hot bath also relaxes your muscles and reduces tension physically and psychically. By adding 1 to 1 ½ cups Epsom salt (magnesium sulfate) and 1 to 1 ½ cups baking soda (sodium bicarbonate) to your bath, you will gain the benefits of magnesium absorbed through your skin and the alkaline-balancing effects of the baking soda, both of which help with sleep.
- **Get a massage or stretch before bed.** This helps relax the body, making it easier to fall asleep.
- **Warm your middle.** This raises your core temperature and helps trigger the proper chemistry for sleep. A hot-water bottle, heating pad—or a warm body—can do the trick.

# THE BLOOD PRESSURE SOLUTION: THE SOLUTION

- **Avoid medications that interfere with sleep.** These include sedatives (which are used to treat insomnia, but ultimately lead to dependence and disruption of normal sleep rhythms), antihistamines, stimulants, cold medication, steroids, and headache medication that contains caffeine.
- **Use herbal therapies.** Try 200 mg of passion flower, or 320 mg to 480 mg of valerian root extract standardized to 0.2 percent valerenic acid one hour before bed.
- **Take 200 mg to 400 mg of magnesium citrate or glycinate before bed.** This relaxes the nervous system and muscles.
- **Other supplements and herbs can be helpful in getting some shuteye.** Try calcium, theanine (an amino acid from green tea), GABA, 5-HTP, and magnolia. (I like a product called Kavinace UltraPM that has a form of GABA, melatonin, and 5-HTP all in one. It works well for many of my patients.)
- **Try 1 mg to 3 mg of melatonin at night,** which can help stabilize your sleep rhythms.
- **Get a relaxation, meditation, or guided imagery CD.** Any of these may help you get to sleep.

## CONCLUSION

---

Left unchecked, high blood pressure or hypertension can lead to heart disease, dementia, stroke and numerous other problems. Fortunately, a number of diet and lifestyle strategies can have a significant impact on normalizing blood pressure without resorting to prescription drugs and other invasive measures.

Lifestyle modifications that can lower blood pressure include maintaining a healthy weight, consuming a diet rich in fruits and vegetables and low in sodium, participating in regular physical activity, and limiting alcohol consumption. Stress management is also beneficial for managing blood pressure.

Give these strategies a try, along with the 10-Day Detox Diet, and see if in just days or weeks you can normalize your blood pressure.

If you are willing to tweak your diet and lifestyle and take a few supplements, your health may change dramatically—and so will your life.

Even armed with these strategies, finding the right foods to normalize blood pressure can sometimes feel confusing. That's why I wrote *Food: What the Heck Should I Eat?*, to help you undo all the beliefs about food that are making you fat and sick and replace them with a new understanding that will lead to health and longevity.

I believe that cultivating and consuming real, whole food is the answer to many of our world's problems. How we grow it, produce it, and eat it affects almost every aspect of our lives and our society. *Food* is an honest how-to guide designed to answer the question, "What the heck should I eat?"

Food is the doorway to living well and loving well—and to fixing much of what's wrong with our world. You have the power to heal high blood pressure, starting with your very next meal.

If you have tried the 10-Day Detox Diet I've discussed in *Food* for at least 40 days and are still not completely better, then you should seek out a Functional Medicine practitioner. You can come see one of my Functional Medicine doctors at [The UltraWellness Center](#) or at the [Cleveland Clinic Center for Functional Medicine](#), where we treat people from all over the world. You can also find a trained practitioner near you through the [Institute for Functional Medicine](#).

The answers are right in front of you. Treat the underlying causes of your illness, and you will begin to experience vibrant health once more.