

# Hypertension

## Related Terms

- High Blood Pressure

## Principal Proposed Natural Treatments

- Biofeedback; Coenzyme Q<sub>10</sub> (CoQ<sub>10</sub>)

## Other Proposed Natural Treatments

- *Achillea wilhelmsii*; Ayurvedic Herbal Combinations; Calcium; Fish Oil; Garlic; Glucomannan; Magnesium; Milk Fermented by Probiotics; Potassium; Stevia; Vitamin C; Many Others

Most people can't tell when their blood pressure is high, which is why hypertension is called the "silent killer." In this case, what you don't know can hurt you. Elevated blood pressure can lead to a greatly increased risk of heart attack, stroke, and many other serious illnesses. Along with high cholesterol and smoking, hypertension is one of the most important causes of atherosclerosis. In turn, atherosclerosis causes heart attacks, strokes, and other diseases of impaired circulation.

The mechanism by which high blood pressure produces atherosclerosis is similar to a hose fitted with a high-pressure nozzle. All such nozzles come with a warning label that states, "Make sure to discharge pressure in hose after using." Unfortunately, many people frequently fail to pay attention to the warning and leave the hose puffed up with full pressure overnight.

This rather common practice does not produce any immediate consequences. The hose doesn't develop leaks at the seams or burst outright on the first occasion you leave it untended.

However, a garden hose that is frequently left under pressure will begin to age more rapidly than it would otherwise. Its lining will begin to crack, its flexibility will diminish, and within a season or two the hose will be sprouting leaks in all directions.

When blood vessels are exposed to constantly high pressure, a similar process is set in motion. Blood pressures as elevated as 220/170 (systolic pressure/diastolic pressure), quite common during activities such as weight lifting, do no harm. Only when excessive pressure is sustained day and night do blood vessel linings begin to be injured and undergo those unhealthy changes known as atherosclerosis.

Thus, although it is important to lower blood pressure with all deliberate speed, only rarely does it need to be lowered instantly. In most situations, you have plenty of time to work on bringing down your blood pressure. However, that doesn't mean that you should ignore it. Over time, high blood pressure can damage nearly every organ in the body.

The best way to determine your blood pressure is to take several readings at different times during the day and on different days of the week. Blood pressure readings will vary quite a bit from moment to moment; what matters most is the average blood pressure. Thus, if many low readings balance out a few high readings, the net result may be satisfactory.

However, it is essential not to ignore a high value by saying, "I was just stressed then." Stress is part of life, and if it raises your blood pressure once, it will do so again. To come up with an accurate number, you must include every measurement in your calculations.

In most cases, the cause of hypertension is unknown. The kidneys play an important role in controlling blood pressure, and the level of squeezing tension in the blood vessels makes a large contribution as well.

Lifestyle changes can dramatically reduce blood pressure. Increasing exercise, stopping smoking, and losing weight can all be highly effective. For many years doctors advised patients with hypertension to cut down on salt in the diet. Today, however, the value of this difficult dietary change has undergone significant questioning. Considering how rapidly our knowledge is evolving, we suggest consulting your physician to learn the latest recommendations.

If lifestyle changes fail to reduce blood pressure, or if you can't make these alterations, many effective drugs are available. Sometimes you need to experiment with a few to find one that agrees with you.