

A Natural Way to Manage Hypertension

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I. DIAGNOSIS

According to the 1990 WHO Diagnostic Standard Report, hypertension is defined as having a blood pressure consistently greater than 140/90 or when checked on three different days, found to be high with a systolic blood pressure greater than 140 mmHg and/or diastolic blood pressure greater than 90 mmHg.

The blood pressure will normally peak at its highest in the morning upon awakening, drop off at its lowest reading in the afternoon, increase once again at bedtime, and then again drop off during the middle of the night. In order to take the blood pressure most accurately, it is best to take it at the same time of day everyday or three times a day in the morning, in the afternoon, and then again at night.

II. CAUSES

The causes of hypertension may be divided into two categories: modifiable and non-modifiable causes. Modifiable causes are those factors which the individual may control such as diet, obesity, smoking, alcohol intake, and mental stress. Non-modifiable causes are factors related to genetics which the individual cannot modify or change, for example, age, sex, or family history.

Generally speaking, genetic factors alone may not cause hypertension. But, genetic factors combined with modifiable factors usually will cause high blood pressure.

III. ESSENTIAL AND SECONDARY HYPERTENSION

In about 90% of people with high blood pressure, the cause is not known. This condition is known as essential hypertension. When the cause of the hypertension is known, the condition is referred to as secondary hypertension.

IV. VARIATIONS IN HYPERTENSION IN THE ELDERLY AND IN WOMEN

The elderly and women have their own hypertensive characteristics:

A. Hypertension in the Elderly. The elderly in North America and in most of European countries are defined as those people greater than 65 years of age. In most Asian countries, the elderly population is defined as people greater than 60 years of age. There are certain characteristics of hypertension in the elderly:

1. In the elderly population, you may only see a high systolic blood pressure reading. This is caused by hardening of the arteries and loss of elasticity of the arterial wall.
2. Also, there may be more fluctuation changes seen in the blood pressure in the elderly. The ability of the body to control blood pressure is especially lessened when moving from a lying to sitting position. This fluctuation is seen even more so when taking antihypertensive medication.

3. Chronic hypertension can often lead to or contribute to other health problems such as coronary heart disease, heart attack, stroke, diabetes, or kidney failure.
4. Due to the aging process and slowing metabolism, the elderly are usually more sensitive to the side effects associated with some of the medication prescribed to treat hypertension.

B. Hypertension in Women. There are certain characteristics of hypertension found in women:

1. During PMS (premenstrual syndrome), because women usually suffer from anxiety, irritability, depression, and fatigue, a woman who is already has hypertension will have a tendency to have higher blood pressure than usual.
2. Birth control pills also can cause hypertension. They may cause a normal blood pressure to be high or make hypertension more pronounced. For women who already have genetic factors for developing hypertension, may have a tendency to develop abnormal blood pressure while taking birth control pills.
3. Pregnancy can also cause hypertension. Pregnancy induced hypertension may especially be seen during a woman's first pregnancy or in pregnancies after 35 years of age. A woman, who has hypertension prior to her pregnancy, may become more hypertensive while she is pregnant.
4. Menopausal women may develop menopausal related hypertension. During menopause, a high systolic blood pressure is usually seen, and the blood pressure also fluctuates more than usual. If the hypertension is related to menopausal syndrome, the high blood pressure will usually return to normal after menopause.

V. HYPERTENSION AND ORIENTAL MEDICINE

Any internal or external factor may cause one of the following conditions to occur which then results in hypertension:

1. Kidney yin deficiency.
2. Liver yang excessive.
3. Chong and Ren imbalance.
4. Excessive heart heat or fire.

VI. ORIENTAL TREATMENT FOR HYPERTENSION

A. Acupuncture

Acupuncture works effectively for essential hypertension, especially in the early stage. The length of the course of treatment depends on the history and severity of the hypertension as well as the individual's sensitivity to the treatment. Generally speaking, 1-2 treatments per week is recommended to start with until the blood pressure is lowered within the normal range and is stabilized. Then, the treatment is cut back gradually to once a week or every other week and then gradually stopped. In order to receive best results in treating hypertension, there must be a trusting relationship between the patient and the practitioner. The patient must be relaxed in order to follow the instructions given by the practitioner for providing relaxation and meditation. Also, it is necessary that the practitioner be relaxed, well-grounded, and highly focused in deep concentration on the needle manipulation and the flow of energy during the treatment.

B. Herbal Treatment

Blood pressure may be effectively treated with herbal formulas. Generally speaking, personalized formulas work better than over-the-counter herbal formulas or products. Herbs are often used in conjunction with medications taken for hypertension. The patient should take the herbs until the blood pressure is lowered into the normal range and then stabilized. It is very important to avoid suddenly stopping to use the herbs.

VII. OTHER TREATMENTS FOR HYPERTENSION

1. Diet

A balanced diet that is low in fat, low in carbohydrates, and has the proper amount of protein, and is limited in salt is helpful in the prevention and treatment of hypertension. The daily dietary intake should include rice, flour, and grain as the main contents. It is important for people to eat 70-80% before feeling full. One should try to avoid eating until 100% of being full. In regards to meat, an intake of 70-100 grams per day is recommended. One should eat approximately 500 grams per day of fruits and vegetables. Oil intake should be limited to 25 grams per day of unsaturated fat. It is recommended that salt intake be limited to 5-6 grams per day. Also, some fruits and vegetables, soy bean, and seaweed contain potassium which is helpful in managing hypertension.

2. Managing Obesity

The management of obesity is very important in the treatment of hypertension, because an obese person is 2-6 times more likely for the potential of having high blood pressure.

3. Exercise

One must choose the proper exercise suitable for their own individual condition. If after exercising you feel pleasantly refreshed, the heart rate has returned to normal, the fatigue has diminished after short period of rest then, it is most likely that you have found an appropriate exercise activity. It is important to exercise 5-7 times per week at 30-40 minute intervals each time. Tai Chi, Qi Gong, mediation, and slow walking are examples of exercises suitable for treatment of hypertension.

4. Stress Management

It is important to avoid stress or emotional disturbances which can cause fluctuation changes in the blood pressure. Therefore, it is important that people make a concerted effort to try to, have an even temperament, let go of pinned up anger, and try not to worry but have a positive outlook on life. Making an effort to enhance one's tolerance for stress is helpful as well.

5. Lifestyle Management

Stop smoking, because nicotine can increase the heart rate and blood pressure, thereby, speeding up the process of atherosclerosis which affects blood circulation in the body. Any one with hypertension should make a big effort to stop smoking as early as possible. Acupuncture is effective treatment for smoking cessation.

Limit alcohol intake. Excessive alcohol intake can also increase the blood pressure and affect the result of medication prescribed for treatment of hypertension. Alcohol consumption should be limited for the treatment of high blood pressure.

Limit caffeine intake. Coffee and strong red tea should especially be avoided as they can cause heart palpitations, over stimulation, and insomnia. Avoiding coffee and strong red tea is highly suggested in the treatment of hypertension.