

Lower your blood pressure without drugs



2013-04-29 - General Health



A number of nondrug measures can help lower your blood pressure, according to a new review from the American Heart Association. Those include exercise, biofeedback, meditation, and a device called RESPeRATE. And while drugs are often necessary, those and other lifestyle changes might be enough to help some people reduce or eliminate their need for medication, our medical experts say. The panel did not review dietary supplements or herbal treatments.

The strongest evidence was for exercise, including brisk walking, strength or resistance training, and, surprisingly, hand exercises that involve squeezing a hand-grip device. Four weeks of exercising with that device resulted in a 10 percent drop in systolic and diastolic blood pressure, the review found. However, the panel advised consulting with your physician about the risks of starting any exercise regimen and the need for careful follow-up.

Behavioral therapies, such as biofeedback techniques and transcendental meditation, which typically involves focused attention on a mantra, helped lower blood pressure by a smaller amount.

The panel noted that RESPeRATE has received Food and Drug Administration approval for reducing blood pressure and stress. The over-the-counter device, which costs about \$300 to \$350, includes a belt to monitor breathing rate, a small battery-operated controller box that generates musical tones that correspond to inspirations and expirations, and earbuds.

Overall, the report concluded that alternative measures reduce systolic blood pressure (the top number) by roughly 2 to 10 millimeters of mercury (mm Hg). In comparison, standard doses of blood-pressure lowering drugs generally reduce systolic blood pressure by about 10 to 15 mm Hg.

The American Heart Association says that due to their modest effects, alternative therapies should be used with, not as a replacement for, standard treatment. Our health experts say that if you have high-normal or mildly elevated blood pressure you could consider trying some of these measures, along with dietary changes like cutting back on sodium, first to see if they bring your blood pressure down sufficiently so that you can avoid drugs.

"Blood pressure drugs are effective and inexpensive, so there is no reason to avoid them if you really require them," says Marvin M. Lipman, M.D., Consumer Reports' chief medical adviser. "But if your blood pressure is just starting to creep up or just above the cut of 140 over 90, it might be worth giving these measures a shot. And people taking blood pressure medication should consider these measures, too, for extra protection." **For Heart Attack Calculator and Regulating Heart Tests go to:**

<http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/2013/02/lower-your-blood-pressure/index.htm>