

PATIENT HANDOUT

Achievable Blood Pressure Reductions From Lifestyle and Mind-Body Techniques

Erica Oberg, ND, MPH

Controlling high blood pressure is important to reduce the risk of health problems related to the blood vessels, including heart disease, stroke, vision loss, kidney damage, erectile dysfunction, and—less serious but still bothersome—problems such as varicose veins. The maximum recommended blood pressure for most people is less than 140/90; for people with diabetes or existing heart or kidney disease, blood pressure should not be above 130/80. Most people with high blood pressure need to try a combination of approaches to bring their blood pressure down. You can try as many of the techniques below as you want and combine them as you wish.

Modification	Strategy	Approximate Resulting Mean Systolic Reduction
Lifestyle Factors		
Weight loss	Maintain an optimal BMI of 18.5-24.9	5 to 20 mm Hg/10 kg weight loss
*DASH eating plan	Consume a high intake of fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy; reduce intake of saturated and total fat; lower use of salt	8 to 14 mm Hg
Sodium restriction	Use less than 2.4 g sodium or 6 g sodium chloride per day	2 to 8 mm Hg
Physical activity	150 minutes/week	4 to 9 mm Hg
Moderate alcohol consumption	Limit to <2 drinks/day for men and 1/day for women	2 to 4 mm Hg
General Mind-Body Factors		
Overall relaxation	Intentionally cultivate inner quiet, physical relaxation, and resistance to stress using any approach, such as listening to music or taking a walk (as opposed to the specific techniques detailed below)	5 to 10 mm Hg
Specific Mind-Body Factors: Autogenic Training		
Progressive muscle relaxation	At least once per day for 10 minutes, practice sequentially tensing and relaxing regions of your body (it helps to start either with your feet or face and work upward/downward)	2 mm Hg
Cognitive/behavioral therapies	Learn how to cope with stress and regulate your emotional responses through psychotherapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, and stress management techniques	9 mm Hg
HeartMath (www.heartmath.com)	Try this program (using books or practicing online) to cultivate heart-centered, positive emotions	11 mm Hg
Biofeedback	Use a device to help learn deep, slow breathing	14 mm Hg
Transcendental meditation	Learn to intentionally quiet your mind and become aware of your inner experience	5 to 12 mm Hg
Breathing exercises	Play with various techniques that deepen your breath and increase oxygenation	6 to 9 mm Hg
Abbreviations: BMI=body mass index, DASH=Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension *The DASH booklet can be downloaded free from the National Institutes of Health website at www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/hbp/dash/new_dash.pdf .		