

Garlic for High Blood Pressure

by Margy Squires

When it comes to heart healthy benefits, garlic smells sweet! The fragrance of this “stinking rose” as it is historically called comes from a sulfur compound it contains called *allicin*. However, allicin is a somewhat unstable substance so finding a way to secure its many benefits – along with the more than 2000 biologically active components of garlic – to bottle it took some doing. Aging garlic over a period of time (18-20 months) chemically converts allicin and the other volatile sulfur compounds into stable, standardized extracts. **That’s great news since studies show garlic reduces heart disease related risks such as inflammation, platelet “stickiness” to lower the risk of blood clots and stroke, and boasts cholesterol lowering ability, too.** This article will focus on aged garlic’s ability to positively influence hypertension or high blood pressure (HBP) evidenced by two recent studies as examples.



What is blood pressure? Let’s use the National Institutes of Health (NIH) definition of “the force of blood pushing against the walls of the arteries as the heart pumps blood” and HBP as a condition when “the force is too high”. This pressure is reflected by two numbers, *systolic* (when the heart is pumping blood) and *diastolic* (when the heart is at rest).

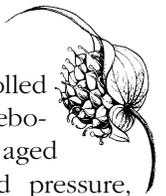
The NIH also defines certain stages in adults (see chart on the next page). Normal blood pressure is below 120/80 mmHg. Testing higher than the normal may put you in a “pre” hypertensive stage and eligible for pharmaceutical intervention. But the dynamics of HBP may warrant lifestyle modification and what is considered complementary medicine. Enter garlic with its many talents.



Hypertensive medications like beta blockers and ACE inhibitors help decrease pressure by either relaxing blood vessels or blocking the formation of chemicals that narrow blood vessels. Garlic possesses the skill to do both, according to the studies and much more for the heart as mentioned earlier.

In the 2013 published study, researchers found garlic’s benefits were dose dependent and as effective as a hypertensive drug, atenolol₁. The 210 hypertensive patients were given either a placebo, a hypertensive medicine or garlic. The garlic takers were further separated into groups by dose, receiving 300, 600, 900, 1200 or 1500 mg per day. While all groups significantly lowered both systolic and diastolic blood pressure as much as the prescription drug, the higher doses of garlic had the greatest reduction. In a subsequent review of garlic studies, the authors note a dose of 600-900 mg showed similar findings.

Another recent trial came from the National Institute of Integrative Medicine in Melbourne, Australia this year₂. According to the authors, it was the first to assess garlic’s effect on “central blood pressure and arterial stiffness, regarded as important risk factors for cardiovascular morbidity”. A total of 88 participants with uncontrolled



How Garlic Helps

- ◆ Relaxes & opens blood vessels
- ◆ Improves micro-circulation
- ◆ Reduces stickiness of platelets (plaque build-up, clots)
- ◆ Lowers LDL & total cholesterol 10-15%
- ◆ Offers antioxidant protection
- ◆ Decreases inflammatory response
- ◆ Supports overall heart health



hypertension completed a double-blind randomized placebo-controlled trial of 12 weeks and were given 1.2 grams of aged garlic extract or placebo. The authors looked at blood pressure, cholesterol, homocysteine, platelet function and inflammatory markers.

Their 2016 published conclusion? That garlic extract is effective in reducing HBP in patients with uncontrolled hypertension. Garlic lowered systolic pressure 11-13 mmHg and diastolic 6-7 mmHg, while improving arterial stiffness. What’s more, garlic helped “inflammation, and other cardiovascular markers in patients with elevated levels”. They felt garlic safe enough to use even with a hypertensive medication.

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If you'd like a time perspective, consider a meta-analysis. A 2008 review of studies published between 1955 and 2007 with specific and like garlic forms and objective study parameters was performed.³ Researchers found garlic “comparable to the hypotensive effects of commonly-prescribed blood pressure drugs (e.g. beta-blockers)” and its enzymes act similarly to ACE inhibitors and antagonists. They further state that a reduction of even 4-5 mmHg systolic and 2-3 mmHg in diastolic could reduce the risk of cardiovascular morbidity and mortality by 8–20%. Supplementing with garlic preparations preserves garlic's beneficial properties and provide “an acceptable alternative or complementary treatment option for hypertension.”



This is just a snapshot of garlic as a hypertension and heart helper. Other garlic studies show antioxidant protection for blood vessels, prevention of plaque buildup, anti-clot formation and reduction of inflammatory prostaglandins. Garlic decreases homocysteine, a risk factor marker in heart disease. And garlic increases micro-circulation. All these traits support healthy blood pressure as well as the heart.

Hypertension can be a silent, life threatening condition as damage to your blood vessels and heart occurs over time, increasing your risk of heart attack and stroke. So know your numbers. If they are not “normal” or optimal, do something! Make lifestyle modifications that include diet and exercise.

STAGES OF HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE IN ADULTS			
Stages	Systolic (top #)		Diastolic (bottom #)
Prehypertension	120-139	OR	80-89
Stage 1	140-159	OR	90-99
Stage 2	160 or higher	OR	100 or higher
Source: www.nhlbi.nih.gov			

Get nutrient savvy so you're not deficient in magnesium or vitamin D₃ (a simple blood test). Deficiency of CoQ10 is common in 39% of hypertensive people. Take omega-3 fatty acids (fish, flaxseed or krill oil). And don't forget garlic for its hypertension and other heart healthy benefits!

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