

# Top Foods to Help Lower Blood Pressure

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## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Arugula is extremely healthy leafy green that helps decrease your blood pressure due to the minerals potassium, calcium and magnesium, which help relax your blood vessels and, in turn, help reduce blood pressure
- › Other foods that can help lower your blood pressure levels include flaxseeds, beets, celery, olive oil and cooked tomatoes
- › High blood pressure, aka hypertension, affects 70 million people in the U.S. and 1 billion people worldwide, and is linked to an increased risk of heart disease, stroke and even dementia

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You've heard it before – what you eat has a direct impact on your health, and the quality of your health naturally affects how you feel. Your blood pressure readings aren't just one isolated aspect of health but are intrinsically tied to many other functions of your body. That said, there are foods to stay away from and foods you should begin eating more of to optimize how well your blood is pumped through your body.

Vegetables are on the short list of foods you should be eating more of to naturally lower your blood pressure. But certain fruits, in moderation, including nuts and seeds, also have a place in lowering your risk for not just [high blood pressure](#), but many related illnesses such as kidney disease, heart disease, stroke and several forms of dementia.

# **DASH, Mediterranean and PAMM Diets: Do They Work to Combat Hypertension?**

The DASH diet, or Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension,<sup>1</sup> consists largely of fresh vegetables, fruits, lean protein, whole grains, low-fat dairy and very low sodium content. It's often believed that it's the low-sodium aspect of the diet that's so important, but this diet may work for some primarily because it's low in sugar/fructose.

The same holds true for reducing your intake of processed foods, which you'll do if you follow the diet, as processed foods are top sources of both heavily processed salt and sugar/fructose.

There are, however, healthier eating plans than the DASH diet, particularly since whole grains and low-fat dairy are not foods I recommend eating. As for the Mediterranean Diet, this "diet" has been around for centuries.

Because the Mediterranean region is known for their rich olives and olive oil, fresh vegetables, fruits, seafood and, infrequently, red meat, people living there are known to be some of the healthiest, longest-living people in the world. Most of the diet's health benefits are likely due to it being low in sugars, moderate in protein and high in fresh fruits and vegetables, along with healthy fats.

Dr. Stephen Sinatra's PAMM, or Pan-Asian Modified Mediterranean, diet is another slant on the Mediterranean diet, which highlights the crucial nature of eating a "high-fiber, healthy-fat, Mediterranean-type, heart-healthy diet," emphasizing healthy fats and vegetables while minimizing synthetic fats.<sup>2</sup> One of the diet's hallmarks is eating the last meal of the day as the lightest, with seaweed included as a heart-healthy option. Sinatra advises an increase in:

- Asparagus, broccoli, kale, Brussels sprouts and spinach as "slow-burning, low-glycemic index vegetables;" low lipid and insulin-spiking allicin veggies onions and garlic; and fresh herbs like thyme, basil and rosemary

- Fatty fish, principally certified wild-caught Alaskan salmon, and the essential fatty acids (EFAs) from other **wild-caught fish** such as mackerel, herring, anchovies and sardines
- Healthy oils, including avocado, sesame, olive, walnut and flax oils
- Nuts and seeds like almonds, chestnuts, walnuts and flaxseed
- Fruits such as blueberries, apricots, apples, peaches, plums, strawberries, cherries and pears (fruit should be eaten in moderation to avoid consuming too much sugar)

The absence of processed foods in all of these diets is key to optimizing your blood pressure and overall health. Ideally, you should focus on eating foods that are very close to the earth, without special processing methods, such as chemicals being added for longer shelf life, necessary.

## **Arugula: Great for Your Heart and Blood Pressure**

Potassium, calcium and magnesium are the "big three" common denominators in a diet that naturally combats high blood pressure, and there are many foods you can eat that will take the stress out of how to do it right, including arugula. Arugula is an often-neglected salad green.

It's too bad, because the easy-to-grow veggie is one of the most advantageous in the entire garden and is especially good for your arteries. It's high in potassium, calcium and magnesium, and all three are helpful because they help relax your blood vessels, which reduces blood pressure levels.

According to Livestrong,<sup>3</sup> arugula doesn't have the most potassium compared to other vegetables, but it does help your body absorb it. There's 150 milligrams (mg) in a 2-cup serving, or about 3% of the 4,700 mg recommended for adults.<sup>4</sup> Regarding the calcium and magnesium content, the same serving size of arugula provides 6% and 5%, respectively, of the recommended daily values based on a 2,000-calorie diet.

The same nutrients in arugula also decrease your risk of a stroke and heart attack, while folate assists in optimal amino acid metabolism, because a shortage in your system can promote unwanted homocysteine levels in your blood, which elevates your heart disease risk. As a crucifer vegetable, **arugula** helps protect against cancer, courtesy of its glucosinolate compound, containing sulfur, which also gives it a far-from-bland, peppery flavor. As Livestrong notes:

*"When you chew arugula, its glucosinolates are broken down into indoles, isothiocyanates and other biologically active compounds ... The compounds derived from glucosinolates may help your body get rid of carcinogens before they have a chance to damage your DNA, and they may also affect hormone activity in ways that impede the development of hormone-related cancers.*

*Although research is ongoing, some epidemiological studies have shown that diets rich in cruciferous vegetables may specifically help reduce the risk of colorectal and lung cancers."<sup>5</sup>*

An important vitamin in arugula is folate (the natural form of folic acid, which is synthetic<sup>6</sup>), aka vitamin B9, noted for its role in preventing birth defects. Eating arugula can also help you lose weight, as it's low in calories and provides good amounts of vitamins A, C, K and calcium and a number of valuable phytonutrients.

In fact, on the Aggregate Nutrient Density Index, or ANDI, which ranks foods by their nutrient density, arugula scores just over 600, making it one of the top 10; that's 30% more nutrient dense than cabbage and 50% more than cauliflower.<sup>7</sup>

## **More Excellent Foods for Your Arteries**

**Beets** — Beets, sometimes known as beetroot, and beet juice have emerged as a trendy health phenomenon, especially by athletes, as the compounds they contain increase stamina and muscle strength.

Beets and beet juice also help lower blood pressure, even comparable to blood pressure medicine, due to the presence of the nitrate NO<sub>3</sub>, which in your body is converted to bioactive nitrite (NO<sub>2</sub>) and nitric oxide (NO), which in turn dilates your blood vessels.

Researchers also found that the nitrates in beetroot juice lowered research participants' blood pressure within just 24 hours.<sup>8</sup> Due to the high sugar content of beetroot juice, I wouldn't recommend this for a long-term solution.

Fermenting beets is another way to enjoy them, and they're extremely healthy, as the nutrients they contain become more bioavailable and provide beneficial bacteria and enzymes. Although beets have the highest sugar content of all vegetables, most people can safely eat beet roots a few times a week.

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**Coriander** – Coriander seeds come from the herb known as cilantro. Coriander has been shown in studies to reduce blood pressure,<sup>9</sup> which is due to an interaction between calcium ions and cholinergic, a neurotransmitter in your nervous system, which is another way your blood vessels may become more relaxed. Grinding the seeds to toss into your smoothies is an excellent way to get more of their nutrients.

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**Pistachios** – Eating pistachios, especially those in raw form, is another delicious way to decrease blood pressure by reducing peripheral vascular resistance, or blood vessel tightening, and your heart rate. One study<sup>10</sup> showed that a single serving of pistachios every day helps reduce systolic blood pressure. You can incorporate pistachios into your diet by adding them to pesto sauces and salads or by eating them plain as a snack.

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**Olive oil** – Olive oil (first cold-pressed and organic) contains inflammation-fighting polyphenols with numerous compounds to lower your blood pressure naturally. Olive oil is a great alternative to canola oil, bottled salad dressing and other vegetable oils, but **don't cook with olive oil**, because it has a low smoke point and is easily damaged by the heat.

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**Celery** – Celery contains high amounts of potassium and is a rich source of such flavonoids as zeaxanthin and lutein, along with beta-carotene, which studies have shown lowers inflammation as well as your risk of heart disease. Once again, blood vessel-relaxing blood compounds, in this case 3-n-butylphthalide (which gives celery its fresh, earthy scent), have been shown to reduce blood pressure levels.

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**Tomatoes** – Tomatoes may help relieve hypertension, in part due to potassium but also because of lycopene.<sup>11</sup> However, be aware that tomatoes are high in **lectins**, which means they should be eaten sparingly and, when you do eat them, cook them first (as an added bonus, cooking tomatoes increases the beneficial lycopene that can be absorbed by your body).

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## The Importance of Healthy Eating for Optimal Blood Pressure Levels

It may sound like a broken record, but eating right to help optimize your blood pressure levels, and thereby lowering your risk of kidney disease, heart disease, stroke, dementia and other serious problems, is extremely important. If you haven't been eating the best diet, don't worry, it's not too late to start. On that note, what you don't eat is just as important as what you do eat, and I recommend avoiding the following foods notorious for causing blood pressure levels to rise:<sup>12</sup>

- Sugar, processed fructose and processed foods, grains
- Read labels and avoid partially hydrogenated oils (synthetic trans fats), found in many processed foods, including packaged cookies, crackers, chips and other snacks
- Omega-6 oils, especially those in vegetable oils such as corn, canola, soy and safflower oils

Instead, focus on eating real food. You'll want to swap nonfiber carbs for healthy fats such as avocados, butter made from raw, grass fed organic milk, organic pastured egg

yolks, coconuts and coconut oil, raw nuts such as pecans and macadamia, grass fed meats and pasture raised poultry. To learn more about healthy eating, please see my [optimal nutrition plan](#).

Again, one of the most important things to remember about maintaining your health is that what's going on in one area of your body is more than a little apt to influence other areas of your body.

That's why eating foods that are good for your heart and your blood pressure go hand in hand. It's not an exaggeration to say that you are what you eat. Making heart-healthy foods a bigger part of your life on a daily basis will impact not only your blood pressure readings, but the way you feel and what you're able to do, longer.

## Sources and References

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- <sup>1</sup> [U.S. News & World Report DASH Diet 2024](#)
- <sup>2, 12</sup> [Dr. Sinatra 2016 \(Archived\)](#)
- <sup>3, 5, 7</sup> [Livestrong April 19, 2016 \(Archived\)](#)
- <sup>4</sup> [USDA, What We Eat in America, NHANES 2009-2010](#)
- <sup>6</sup> [CDC. General Information About NTDs, Folic Acid, and Folate](#)
- <sup>8</sup> [J. Nutr. June 1, 2013 vol. 143, no. 6, 818-826](#)
- <sup>9</sup> [Journal of Ethnopharmacology February 25, 2009](#)
- <sup>10</sup> [Hypertension. 2012 Jul;60\(1\):58-63](#)
- <sup>11</sup> [Nutrients. 2013 Sep; 5\(9\): 3696–3712](#)