

## **Arthritis**

Osteoarthritis. This common degenerative joint disease is part of the aging process. The condition may be associated with broken bones and can develop in young adults from wear and tear on the body's load-bearing joints, often as a result of intense athletic activity. In cases of osteoarthritis, the cartilage and bone cannot repair themselves sufficiently to keep up with the damage.

### Alternative Choices

Because medical science has not found any full cures for the various kinds of arthritis, many people turn to alternative treatments to ease their pain and disability. While few alternative approaches can definitively be substantiated in controlled studies of their effectiveness, research indicates that some of these methods can play significant role in treating arthritic ailments. **Meditation**, self-hypnosis, **guided imagery**, and **relaxation** techniques, for example, can have positive effects in controlling chronic arthritis pain. Arthritis sufferers should be extremely cautious, however, about practices that claim to "cure" the disease. Furthermore, what appears to work for one person under a given set of circumstances may not work at all for someone else.

### Acupressure and Acupuncture

Some arthritis patients find that these therapies, administered by a trained practitioner, offer effective relief from the pain of rheumatoid arthritis or osteoarthritis for several weeks or months.

### Body Work

In combination with other treatments, soft-tissue massage around affect joints or compassionate touching by a physician or other practitioner can have a comforting, reassuring effect on those who suffer from arthritis. Manipulation by a trained therapist constitutes passive exercise for people unable to perform vigorous exercise. In addition to making a patient feel better physically, sympathetically administered touch therapy can help soothe the emotional effects of chronic illness. Studies suggest that relieving stress and tension has a positive influence on the body's hormonal balance.

### Chiropractic

After diagnostic examination, testing, and appropriate conventional therapy, a chiropractor may manipulate the spine and other arthritic joints to relieve pain and help reestablish normal use.

### Herbal Therapies

Among the various remedies herbalists recommend to relieve pain is a 5-ml tincture made from 2 parts willow (*Salix* spp.) bark and 1 part each of black cohosh (*Cimicifuga racemosa*) and nettle (*Urtica dioica*) taken three times a day. To relive muscle tension,

rub a tincture of lobelia (*Lobelia inflata*) and cramp (*Viburnum opulus*) bark on the affected area.

### Homeopathy

For chronic osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis, constitutional remedies will be prescribed after consultation with a trained homeopathic practitioner. Homeopathic remedies to relieve immediate pain and joint stiffness may include Rhus toxicodendron or Bryonia.

### Hydrotherapy

Swimming or other water exercise, preferably in a heated pool, allows arthritis patients to work on movement of affected joints and improve muscle strength; the water helps support the body and reduce the stress of gravity.

### Nutrition and Diet

Avoiding specific foods can stop arthritic symptoms tied to allergies, especially to grains, nuts, meats, eggs, and dairy products. Use trial and error, preferably under the supervision of an allergist.

Some practitioners recommend cutting out plants in the nightshade family: tomato, potato, eggplant, and pepper. They believe the alkaloids in these foods inhibit formation of the collagen that makes up cartilage.

Low-fat, low-protein vegetarian diets may ease the pain and inflammation of rheumatoid arthritis. Positive results are reported from eliminating partially hydrogenated fats and polyunsaturated vegetable oils, and supplementing the diet with flax oil, sardines, and other oily fish as a source of omega-3 fatty acids.

Vitamin therapy may relieve certain arthritic systems. Beta carotene (vitamin A) has an antioxidant effect on cells, neutralizing destructive molecules called free radicals. Vitamin C, B<sub>6</sub>, and E, as well as zinc, are thought to enhance collagen production and the repair of connective tissue. Vitamin C may also be advised for people taking aspirin, which depletes the body's vitamin C balance. Niacin (vitamin B<sub>3</sub>) may also be helpful, although excessive use may aggravate liver problems. Always take vitamin supplements under professional guidance, since overdoses of some vitamin compounds can have side effects or undesirable interactions with drugs.

Some therapists recommend cherries or dark red berries to stimulate the production of collagen, essential to cartilage repair.

### Yoga

A number of yoga positions (opposite) may have beneficial effects on arthritis.

### At-Home Remedies

Heat and rest – traditional remedies for arthritic pain – are very effective in short term for most people with the disease. Overweight sufferers should begin weight reduction, especially when arthritis strikes the lower back and legs.

If arthritic pain comes on unexpectedly, supplement an over-the-counter painkiller with dry heat from a heating pad or moist heat in the form of a hot bath or a hot-water bottle wrapped in a towel. Regular exercise is important to keep the joints mobile. People with weakened, badly deformed fingers from rheumatoid arthritis benefit from specially designed utensils and door and drawer handles; people suffering weakness in legs and arms from osteoarthritis can use special bathroom fixtures, especially tub rails and elevated toilet seats.

## **Asthma**

### Alternative Choices

Many people have reported success with alternative asthma treatments, but even advocates recommend these methods only as complements to conventional therapies. Remember: Once diagnosed, asthma should be monitored by a physician, and serious episodes always require conventional medical attention.

### Acupressure

Applying gentle pressure to certain body points may help relieve some of the discomfort of asthma. Reaching over your left shoulder with your right hand, press firmly on the part of your back in between the left shoulder blade and spine (point BL 13); take five deep breaths, then repeat on the other side. Or put your fists on your chest, thumbs pointing upward, and feel for the sensitive spot next to the breastbone, just under the collarbone (point KI 27). Press firmly for two minutes.

### Acupuncture

Several medical studies suggest that acupuncture may help alleviate the symptoms of asthma. The procedure should be carried out only by a licensed acupuncturist.

### Aromatherapy

Essential oils such as eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus globulus*), hyssop (*Hyssopus officinalis*), aniseed (*Pimpinella anisum*), lavender (*Lavandula officinalis*), pine (*Pinus sylvestris*), and rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) may help ease breathing and relieve nasal congestion. Inhaled through the nose, a few drops of one of the oils or a mixture of several dabbed on a handkerchief or tissue can help breathing during a mild episode of asthma. If you feel congested at other times (not during an episode), mix a few drops of essential oil in a sink full of hot water, cover your head with a towel, and inhale the fragrant steam through your nose.

### Chinese Herbs

The Chinese herb ephedra (*Ephedra sinica*) is a potent bronchodilator. CAUTION: Large quantities of this herb can have the same effect as large quantities of epinephrine; do not use it if you have high blood pressure or heart disease. Prepare an infusion by combining 5 grams ephedra, 4 grams cinnamon sticks (*Cinnamomum cassia*), 1.5 grams licorice (*Glycyrrhiza uralensis*), and 5 grams apricot seed (*Prunus armeniaca*). Steep the mixture in cold water, and then bring to a boil. Drink it hot.

### Herbal Therapies

Elecampane (*Inula helenium*), a root that acts as a soothing expectorant, may help clear the body of excess mucus. To prepare an infusion, shred the root to yield 1 tsp and add a full cup of cold water; let the infusion stand for 10 hours, then strain and drink it hot three times daily. An infusion made from mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*) is recommended for soothing the mucous membranes, especially during nighttime episodes.

### Homeopathy

Homeopaths offer a variety of treatments for asthma symptoms. Following are just a few: To help calm restlessness and anxiety, take *Arsenicum album* (30c) as required. For symptoms that worsen at night or during cold weather, or that come on very suddenly, take Aconite (6c) as required. For symptoms exacerbated by dampness, take *Natrum sulphuricum* (6c) as required. For more remedies, consult a licensed homeopath.

### Reflexology

Massage the skin between the big toe and second toe on both feet; this area is said to correspond to your throat and lungs. Then, flexing so the toes are spread apart, massage the ball of the foot, the area said to correspond to the lungs and chest.

### Yoga

Yoga can help you learn to breathe deeply and to relax, thereby helping you deal more effectively with stress, a common trigger of asthma.

## **Cancer**

### Complementary Therapies

Alternative and unconventional treatments for cancer are numerous and varied. While some legitimate therapies offer real support, many questionable therapies have no benefits, may be dangerous, and may harm patients by delaying appropriate care. Even the most promising unconventional therapies do not cure cancer and should never replace standard treatment. Instead, supportive therapies should complement conventional care.

Appropriate complementary therapies improve quality of life and may relieve physical and emotional stress. The act of seeking complementary therapy is beneficial in its own

right: It gives patients a sense of control over their illness and the opportunity to play a role in their own care. Before trying any complementary cancer therapy, research it thoroughly to make sure it is potentially beneficial and absolutely safe. Then check with your doctor to be sure it will not compromise standard treatment.

### Acupuncture

Acupuncture has proved to relieve pain associated with many major illnesses. Although scientific study has not fully documented its effectiveness in treating cancer pain and side effects such as nausea and vomiting, it is a safe therapy that many cancer patients find beneficial.

### Body Work

By promoting relaxation, body-work therapies such as massage, qigong, and reflexology ease muscle tension and may alleviate other symptoms such as nausea and chronic pain. Because many body-work therapies provide comforting physical contact, they can lessen the anxiety, depression, and isolation that cancer patients often feel.

### Chinese Herbs

Some cancer sufferers report relief from pain, nausea, and vomiting using traditional Chinese medicine. Most practitioners recommend herbal remedies not to cure cancer but to relieve side effects of conventional treatment. Researchers are studying plants used in traditional Chinese medicine to identify constituents that may combat cancer cells directly or stimulate the immune system to do so, among them astragalus (*Astragalus membranaceus*), dong quai (*Angelica sinensis*), and Asian ginseng (*Panax ginseng*).

### Exercise

Exercise can help control fatigue, muscle tension, and anxiety. Patients tend to feel better if they do exercises such as walking or swimming, which calm the mind as well as strengthen the body.

### Herbal Therapies

Thousands of herbs are used by folk healers worldwide to treat cancer, but no herbal remedy cures cancer, despite claims to the contrary. Some nontoxic herbs can be used to relieve symptoms and support general health, but because some herbs contain toxic ingredients, check with your doctor before taking any herb to relieve cancer symptoms.

### Homeopathy

Homeopathic remedies do not treat cancer directly, but some can alleviate side effects of radiation and chemotherapy. Consult a professional homeopath for safe and appropriate remedies.

## Mind/Body Medicine

Some mind/body therapies work to improve quality of life through behavior modification; other encourages expression of emotions. Behavior therapies such as guided imagery, progressive muscle relaxation, hypnotherapy, and biofeedback are used to alleviate pain, nausea, vomiting, and the anxiety that may occur in anticipation of or after cancer treatment. Individual or group counseling and art or music therapy let patients confront problems and emotions caused by cancer and receive support from fellow patients. Patients who pursue these types of therapies tend to feel less lonely, less anxious about death, and more optimistic about recovery.

## Nutrition and Diet

Scientific evidence suggests that nutrition can play a role in cancer prevention. But not diet has been shown to slow or reverse cancer – and no diet cures cancer. Vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients may inhibit cancer by neutralizing carcinogens, ensuring proper immune function, or preventing tissue and cell damage. Researchers are particularly interested in antioxidants – vitamin A (particularly beta carotene), C, and E, and selenium – but are also studying folic acid, vitamin B<sub>6</sub>, magnesium, zinc, and coenzyme Q10, among others.

Because too much of some vitamins can be harmful, many experts are cautious about dietary supplements. Instead, they advise a varied diet that includes lots of fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grains; avoids processed, smoke, cured, fried, or barbecued foods; emphasized lean cuts of meat and low-fat seafood; and minimizes sugar, fats, and alcohol.

Many customized diets for cancer emphasize vegetarianism, and patients who follow a nutritionally sound vegetarian diet tend to feel better. Unfortunately, many anticancer diets also promote fasting, purging, and taking supplemental “immune-boosting” vitamins, minerals, and other concoctions that do not treat cancer and may be both harmful and expensive. As a rule, patients should avoid any diet that claims to cure cancer, advocates abandoning standard treatment, causes severe weight loss or weakness, requires severe food restriction, or costs a lot of money.

## Controversial Cancer Treatments

The search for new cancer treatments is a vigorous and highly controversial branch of medical research. All treatments must be thoroughly tested and proved effective before they are authorized for general use. Supporters for some experimental treatments claim remarkable recoveries; critics insist that objective trials, not anecdotal claims, are the only true measure of their worth.

The following treatments have their share of advocates but have thus far been deemed ineffective or unproven in independent tests and clinical trials: hydrazine sulfate, studied by Dr. Joseph Gold as a cancer therapy since the 1970s; Dr. Stanislaw Burzynski's

treatment with antineoplastons, originally synthesized from human urine; the “immuno-augmentative therapy” of the late Dr. Lawrence Burton; Dr. Emanuel Revics’s “biologically guided chemotherapy”; Dr. Gaston Naessens’s “714X” therapy; and shark cartilage supplements.

### At-Home Care

Relieving side effects of treatment:

- ✚ After radiation therapy, be gentle to your skin. Do not scrub it, expose it to sunlight, or wear thigh clothing. Aloe vera ointment is gentle and soothing, and you can ask your radiation oncologist about other nonirritating lotions.
- ✚ Eat light snacks throughout the day rather than three heavy meals. Also try eating food cold or at room temperature to avoid, nausea.
- ✚ If your treatment involves lowering your white blood cell count, steer clear of sick people; tell your doctor about any fever or unusual symptoms.

Relieving pain:

- ✚ In addition to taking prescribed medication, try relaxation techniques such as yoga, meditation, or massage given by a friend or spouse.

Other tips:

- ✚ Join a cancer support group.
- ✚ Get plenty of rest.
- ✚ Rather than feeling compelled to maintain a “positive attitude,” express your emotions honestly. Don’t worry if you sometimes feel depressed or afraid: These are normal and legitimate reactions that will not make your cancer worse.
- ✚ Fill your days with activities you enjoy. Reading a good book, listening to music, and talking with friends are simple pleasures, but surprising therapeutic.
- ✚ Contact the American Cancer Society and the National Cancer Institute for free information about cancer prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and tips for managing cancer symptoms.

## **Cholesterol Problems**

### Alternative Choices

Alternative therapists offer a range of natural ways to control your cholesterol levels. All can be pursued independently, many in conjunction with drug therapy. The following list of treatment will let you customize your own program. To be safe, advise your doctor if you are using any alternative therapeutic substances or methods before mixing them with prescription drugs.

## Ayurvedic Medicine

Ayurvedic healers have traditionally employed Malabar tamarind, also known as Brindall berry, a yellowish fruit from India used extensively in curries, to treat obesity. Some studies suggest that the fruit may also help reduce total cholesterol and triglyceride levels.

## Chinese Medicine

Traditional Chinese healers treat various forms of chronic heart disease, along with factors like high cholesterol, with acupuncture and an herbal therapy that employs polygonum (*Polygonum multiflorum*). Because Chinese herbs almost always work in combinations rather than individually, you should consult a trained herbalist for an appropriate prescription.

## Herbal Therapies

A highly touted remedy for fighting high cholesterol is gugulipid (*Commiphora mukul*), an extract of the mukul myrrh tree of southern India. Gugulipid's ability to control cholesterol and triglyceride levels has been compared to that of some synthetic drugs, with claims that it lowers LDL- and raises HDL-cholesterol levels without side effects.

Other herbs reputed to have cholesterol-lowering properties include alfalfa (*Medicago sativa*), turmeric (*Curcuma longa*), Asian ginseng (*Panax ginseng*), and fenugreek (*Trigonella foenum-graecum*). You might also consult a nutritionally oriented doctor about the benefits of phytosterol tablets. Phytosterols are plant compounds structurally comparable to cholesterol that effectively block uptake of cholesterol in the liver.

## Lifestyle

Evidence suggests that even though exercise alone cannot lower total cholesterol, moderate exercise several times a week can help raise HDL-cholesterol levels in many people. Vigorous exercise may raise HDL levels even higher, although at some point athletes apparently reach an "HDL plateau".

## Mind/Body Medicine

Stress is believed to contribute to elevated cholesterol, so relaxation techniques that combat stress may help lower cholesterol levels. Progressive relaxation with guided imagery is something you can try anywhere, anytime. You might also try massage therapy, yoga, meditation, or biofeedback.

## Nutrition and Diet

The basic dietary rules for lowering cholesterol are simple: Avoid saturated fats and dietary cholesterol. Experts recommended a diet with not more than 30 percent of your daily calories from fat; some say 20 percent. Saturated fats derived from animal products

and tropical oils should be kept to a minimum, so avoid eating deep-fried packaged foods. Eat more vegetables, fruits, and grains, which are cholesterol free, virtually fat free, and rich in fiber.

Garlic (*Allium sativum*) and onion (*Allium cepa*) are believed lower cholesterol, but reports vary on how much you should eat in order to benefit. It's safe to say that the more you eat, preferably raw, the better the effect.

## **Diabetes**

### Alternative Choices

Since diabetes that is incorrectly treated can be life-threatening, you should never try to treat the disease without the help of a doctor, and you should always discuss any possible treatments thoroughly. Some alternative remedies offer variations of diabetic diets. Others emphasize supplemental vitamins and minerals, prescribe herbs to restore blood sugar levels, or treat secondary effects. Stress-reduction practices may also help lower blood glucose levels.

### Acupuncture

Stimulation of certain points may relieve pain associated with diabetic neuropathy, boost the immune system, and minimize circulatory system complications. Consult a licensed practitioner.

### Chinese Herbs

Chinese herbal medicines, including ginseng root (*Panax ginseng*), are frequently used to alleviate some symptoms of diabetes; consult a practitioner for a comprehensive treatment plan.

### Herbal Therapies

Check with a practitioner to make sure herbs are appropriate for your condition. Remember: If you need insulin to manage your diabetes, there is not herbal substitute for the hormone.

Blueberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*) leaves in a decoction may lower blood glucose levels and help maintain the vascular system. This remedy may also help to keep the blood vessels of the eye from hemorrhaging if you develop diabetic retinopathy. Diabetics in one study who ate crackers made from the powdered form of burdock (*Arctium lappa*) after a starchy meal had a lowered incidence of hyperglycemia. A cream made with cayenne (*Capsicum frutescens*) may relieve pain associated with peripheral neuropathy, a type of diabetic neuropathy.

Supplementing the diet with fenugreek (*Trigonella foenum-graecum*) seeds has been shown in clinical and experimental studies to reduce blood glucose and insulin levels while lowering blood cholesterol. Garlic (*Allium sativum*) may lower blood pressure as well as levels of blood sugar and cholesterol.

Ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*) extracts have been used to stem deteriorating vision in patients by maintaining adequate blood flow to the retina. Other reported benefits of ginkgo include reducing the risk of heart disease, hypertension, and elevated cholesterol levels.

Onion (*Allium cepa*) may free up insulin to help metabolize glucose in the blood, thus lowering blood glucose levels. Both raw and boiled onion extracts have been found to have this effect. Onion is also considered beneficial in maintaining a healthy cardiovascular system.

### Lifestyle

In laboratory tests, exercise has been shown to increase the tissue levels of chromium, which the body uses to regulate blood glucose and cholesterol levels. For Type 1 diabetics, exercise has also been found to increase the body's ability to use available insulin so that few insulin injections are needed. **WARNING:** If you have Type 1 diabetes, keep in mind that exercise lowers your blood glucose; eat a carbohydrate snack before exercising, and eat or drink again if you feel the warning symptoms of a hypoglycemic attack.

Type 2 diabetics who need to lose weight can benefit from moderate exercise. However, if you are Type 2 diabetic, you should avoid weight lifting or pulling heavy objects; these activities raise blood pressure and may aggravate any eye problems that stem from diabetes.

If you are diabetic, be sure to take good care of your teeth and floss regularly; diabetes can exacerbate gum disease.

### Mind/Body Medicine

Any sort of practice that will lower your stress level, such as biofeedback, meditation, hypnotherapy, or other relaxation techniques, may help lessen your insulin requirements.

### Nutrition and Diet

Some practitioners claim that diabetes is a disorder of Western lifestyles, pointing out that when people in other cultures abandon native foods for a diet of refined and processed foods, diabetes rates begin to rise. The high-carbohydrate high-plant-fiber diet (HCF diet) is an alternative to the conventional diet plan for diabetics.

The HCF diet calls for diabetics to follow these daily guidelines in planning their meals: Eat 70 to 75 percent complex carbohydrates, 15 to 20 percent proteins, and only 5 to 10

percent fats. The HCF diet is said to boost insulin's ability to promote blood glucose as an energy source, improve cholesterol levels, reduce the incidence of hyperglycemia and hypoglycemia, and help with weight loss for Type 2 diabetics.

A modified version of the HCF diet further restricts what foods may be eaten but increases the allowable amount of complex carbohydrates. Once university study indicated that a high-carbohydrate, high-fiber diet could reduce the insulin demands of Type 1 diabetics by 30 to 40 percent, and Type 2 diabetics by 75 to 100 percent.

Diabetics should avoid sugar, as it can lower the body's glucose tolerance and worsen circulatory problems. Nutritionists also emphasize the importance of certain foods, vitamins, and minerals, including the following:

Chromium supplements can be very helpful for people with diabetes. Chromium not only lowers blood glucose levels and improves glucose tolerance but it also lowers insulin levels and helps hold down blood cholesterol levels.

Inositol, a B- complex vitamin, has been shown to help protect diabetics from peripheral neuropathy by relieving numbness and tingling in the hands and feet. However, since inositol might alter blood sugar levels, make sure to check with your practitioner before starting supplements. Biotin, also called vitamin H, may improve glucose metabolism in diabetics.

Vitamin B<sub>6</sub> may help decrease the severity of diabetic neuropathy and reduce insulin demands in Type 2 diabetics. Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> may help treat diabetic neuropathy; injections may prove more beneficial than oral does.

Diabetics may need supplement of vitamin C to make up for low blood levels of insulin, which normally works to help cells absorb the vitamin. Proper amounts of vitamin C help the body maintain good cholesterol levels, fight off infection by bolstering the immune system, and prevent cataracts. Although some practitioners recommend supplementing your diet with up to 1 gram of vitamin C per day, you should consult your practitioner to make sure this is a safe dosage for you to take. Vitamin E may help limit damage to the vascular system and improve blood cholesterol levels.

Manganese helps the body metabolize glucose; diabetics often have a serious manganese deficiency. Magnesium supplements may help control diabetic retinopathy and reduce the possibility of cardiovascular damage.

Zinc may help increase glucose tolerance, and potassium may improve a diabetic's ability to utilize insulin. Copper supplements may help improve cardiovascular fitness.

Okra and peas can help stabilize blood sugar levels and provide fiber in a high-complex-carbohydrate diet. Some research suggests that cinnamon can lower insulin requirements in Type diabetics; seasoning your food with as much as ¼ tsp at every meal may help regulate blood sugar levels.

## **High Blood Pressure**

### Alternative Choices

Many alternative therapies for high blood pressure focus on relaxation techniques. Others are attempts to get closer to the physiological roots of the problem, either by changing the patient's habits or lifestyle, or by influencing the operation of the heart and blood vessels.

### Acupressure

Applying gentle pressure to several key points on the body may help improve circulation and reduce high blood pressure.

### Body Work

Regular sessions of massage or shiatsu can help lower blood pressure by promoting relaxation. Both therapies employ touch and manipulation to reduce tension in the body. While massage treats the entire body, shiatsu emphasizes special pressure points, such as those on the backs of the legs and on the inner wrist.

### Chinese Medicine

Traditional Chinese healers treat high blood pressure by coupling acupuncture with herbal and massage therapy. Acupuncture may benefit people with moderate hypertension, but it is not recommended for those with severe cases. Chrysanthemum flower (*Chrysanthemum indicum*), peony (*Paeonia lactiflora*) root, eucommia bark (*Eucommia ulmoides*), and prunella (*Prunella vulgaris*) are among the many Chinese herbs that might be prescribed for high blood pressure.

### Herbal Therapies

Hawthorn (*Crataegus laevigata*), used to treat many circulatory disorders, may help reduce high blood pressure. Over time, the herb may help dilate blood vessels while also moderating heart rate. Hawthorn tea can be prepared at home by steeping the dried flowers and berries in hot water for 10 to 15 minutes. Research indicates that ample consumption of garlic (*Allium sativum*) and onion (*Allium cepa*) can help reduce blood pressure. Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*), used only when needed, may work as a relaxant for people experiencing undue stress.

### Mind/Body Medicine

A number of methods, including biofeedback, meditation, and hypnotherapy, call on the mind to relax the body and, practiced over time with guidance from trained professionals,

may help lower blood pressure. Positive imagery – picturing yourself floating in calm water, for instance – can also work well for some people.

### Nutrition and Diet

Adjusting the foods you eat will help keep your blood pressure in check. Your diet should be high in fiber, low in fat and salt. With these pointers in mind, emphasize fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Enhance the flavor of your food with seasonings other than salt, and avoid processed foods, which tend to be high in sodium. You should also watch what you drink. Studies suggest that caffeine elevates blood pressure, at least in the short term, while moderate use of alcohol may lower it. Keep cocktails to a minimum, though; more than two ounces of alcohol per day can aggravate hypertension.

Of the vitamins and minerals that help lower blood pressure, potassium has one of the best track records. To get the 3,000 to 4,000 mg per day that researchers recommend, starting eating more fresh vegetables and fruits, especially bananas. (Ask your doctor before taking potassium supplements, as too much of the substance can be dangerous.) Fish is a good source of fatty acids, which help relax arteries and thin the blood. Although it does contain sodium, celery is especially beneficial because it also contains ingredients believed to relax blood vessel walls.

Several studies have demonstrated that hypertensives benefit from daily doses of calcium (800 mg) or magnesium (300 mg). Patients sometimes respond better to one than to the other. After checking with your doctor, try calcium supplements for a month. If you do not notice improvement, try magnesium. You can also get calcium naturally from nonfat and low-fat milk, yogurt, and cheese. Many types of seeds, nuts, beans, peas, and dark green leafy vegetables contain both calcium and magnesium.

### Yoga

Mainly because of its relaxing effects, yoga is highly recommended for hypertension.

### At-Home Remedies

- ✚ Adopt a healthful diet. Eat lots of fruit, vegetables, and whole grains. Give up salty foods and add seasonings other than salt to your meals. Consume alcohol and caffeine sparingly.
- ✚ Exercise regularly to shed extra pounds and get your blood flowing. Activities such as walking, jogging, cycling, and swimming lower blood pressure over the long term.
- ✚ You can't always avoid stress, but you can learn better ways to cope with it. Researchers believe that stress does not come simply from having too much to do. Rather, it arises from situations that leave you feeling you have no control over matters. Next time you feel stressed, ask yourself why, then concentrate on solving the problem.
- ✚ If you smoke, quit.

## **Obesity**

### Alternative Choices

Most alternative therapies work well when used to complement an existing program of proper diet and exercise.

### Acupressure

Some food addicts have found that use of a press needle or a plastic devise placed over certain acupressure points on the ear helps alleviate cravings. Consult a practitioner familiar with treating eating disorders.

### Chinese Medicine

The Chinese herb ephedra (*Ephedra sinica*) contains ephedrine, which increases the metabolic rate in fat tissue. Be aware that this treatment can have potent side effects, including insomnia, anxiety, heart arrhythmias, and hypertension. Do not use it if you have diabetes, thyroid problems, or heart disease. For best results see a practitioner or Chinese medicine, who will work on regulating all of your organs, especially the spleen.

### Herbal Therapies

To stimulate your metabolic rate, try kelp (*Fucus spp.*) in tablet form three to four times a day; it is thought to be especially good for thyroid-related obesity. Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*) may flush out the kidneys, boost metabolism, and offset a craving for sweets. Eat the leaves raw in a salad or make a tea by boiling 2 to 3 tsp of the root in a cup of water for 10 to 15 minutes. Drink three times a day.

### Homeopathy

Homeopathy offers treatments for various aspects of obesity. For example, many over-the-counter mixtures contain *Argentum nitricum*, which may cure intense sugar cravings. If your weight does not improve in one to two months after beginning at-home homeopathic treatment, see a professional.

### Lifestyle

Smoking provides an excellent example of how a predisposition toward obesity can lure a person into an unhealthy lifestyle. Studies show that overweight teenage girls are more apt to smoke and are less responsive to programs designed to help them quit because they think cigarettes keep their weight down. While smoking does suppress appetite, it also adversely affects fat storage, leading to more deposits in the waist area. Overweight people also tend to drink alcohol more, adding to their caloric intake; alcohol is processed in the body much like fatty foods.

## Mind/Body Medicine

Hypnotherapy, guided imagery, and yoga may help with weight loss by altering the way you relate to food. Check with a specialist in these techniques.

## Nutrition and Diet

A diet of complex carbohydrates, such as potatoes and pasta, as well as chicken, fish, and plenty of vegetables, should fill you up without filling you out.

Consider eating your main meal in the middle of the day, when you will burn off more of the calories you take in; a large meal eaten at night, when you are more sedentary, is less easily digested and absorbed.

Replace daily consumption of soft drinks, fruit juices, and milk with six to eight glasses of water.

Avoid diets that count calories. The grueling routine of such a diet increases your risk for developing eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia.

Always keep in mind that you cannot shed pounds unless your energy output exceeds your energy input.

## At-Home Remedies

Certain at-home remedies can help with some side effects associated with obesity, such as constipation.

- ✚ 1 to 2 tsp a day of brewer's yeast or some dandelion will reduce a craving for sweets. Bee pollen or a dash of cayenne (*Capsicum frutescens*) may increase your metabolism.
- ✚ A tea made from rhubarb root may alleviate constipation.