

# Relaxation Methods Help Temporarily Lower Blood Pressure

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May 08, 2025

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Tai chi, yoga, and mindfulness techniques lowered blood pressure by 5 to 10 mm Hg in just eight to 12 weeks, delivering results similar to low-dose medications when practiced consistently
- › Stress reduction methods like deep breathing and meditation worked in the short term but lost effectiveness when people stopped practicing them, showing the importance of daily commitment
- › A large study found that tai chi was more effective than aerobic exercise at lowering systolic blood pressure, with more participants reaching normal levels compared to those doing aerobics
- › Blood pressure medications often come with side effects like fainting, kidney injury, and cognitive decline, making natural alternatives like tai chi and lifestyle changes a safer first step
- › Managing your nervous system with sun exposure, grounding, and daily relaxation practices gives you control over your blood pressure without relying on drugs or short-term fixes

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), at least half of American adults today have high blood pressure or hypertension.<sup>1</sup> Globally, around 1.28 billion people are dealing with this condition, and it's silently damaging their organs and raising their risk of heart attack, stroke, and kidney failure.

High blood pressure is often called the “silent killer” because it usually has no symptoms – until it’s already caused irreversible damage. Left untreated, high blood pressure thickens your arteries, weakens your heart, and shaves years off your life.

## **What Do Your Blood Pressure Readings Mean?**

Your blood vessels are composed of elastic tissues filled with fluid, which holds them under pressure – this means the fluid pushes against the walls of the vessels, trying to expand them.

Blood pressure is measured by determining how much external force is necessary to exceed the artery’s pressure, compressing it so that blood no longer flows through it. The more blood the heart pumps and the narrower the arteries, the higher the pressure. Thus, blood pressure is a result of two factors – the amount of blood in the arteries and the constriction or relaxation of the arteries.

- **Understanding the numbers** – A blood pressure measurement has two numbers. The top number is your systolic blood pressure, and the lower number is your diastolic blood pressure.
- **What is systolic blood pressure?** This is the highest pressure in the arteries and happens when your heart ventricles contract. Picture your heart beating – Systolic pressure is the pressure your blood is exerting against your artery walls.
- **How about diastolic blood pressure?** This refers to the lowest arterial pressure that happens during the resting phase of your cardiac cycle. To put it simply, diastolic blood pressure is the pressure when your heart is resting between beats and is filling with blood and getting ready for the next beat.
- **Current blood pressure guidelines** – As of 2017, American College of Cardiology and American Heart Association's clinical guidelines call for a blood pressure goal of 120/80.

Elevated blood pressure or prehypertension is defined as a systolic blood pressure between 120 and 129. Stage 1 high blood pressure is 130 to 139 systolic, and 80 to 89 diastolic. Stage 2 high blood pressure is anything over 140 systolic and 90 diastolic. Anything over 180 systolic and/or 120 diastolic is considered a hypertensive crisis.<sup>2</sup>

As noted in a 2019 review in the Cleveland Clinic Journal of Medicine,<sup>3</sup> the 2017 guidelines raised the number of American adults diagnosed with high blood pressure at that time from 31.9% to 45.6%. In fact, these guidelines for healthy blood pressure have gone through a bewildering number of changes over the past several years. Read more about it in [“Do You Know Your Blood Pressure? Your Brain Depends on It.”](#)

## **Do Relaxation Techniques Really Help Lower Blood Pressure?**

One significant reason for the increasing cases of high blood pressure is that many people today are constantly dealing with stress and anxiety. Stress plays a direct and measurable role in high blood pressure. When your body stays in fight-or-flight mode for too long, your blood vessels constrict, your heart rate spikes, and your pressure surges. That’s why stress reduction techniques – from breathing exercises to tai chi – are being studied for their effect on hypertension.

A recent systematic review published in BMJ Medicine<sup>4</sup> set out to compare different non-drug interventions including yoga, meditation, music therapy, breathing techniques, and more – to see which ones delivered real, measurable results.

- **This comprehensive review looked at whether stress-reduction methods lower blood pressure** – The researchers analyzed 182 randomized controlled trials with over 14,000 participants. Among these studies, 166 were focused on high blood pressure, while 16 looked at elevated blood pressure (pre-hypertension).<sup>5</sup>
- **The research included people with various health backgrounds** – The research aimed to be as comprehensive as possible. Some participants had mild high blood pressure, while others were already diagnosed with full-blown hypertension. Many

had other chronic conditions, including diabetes and heart disease. Others had no diagnosed illnesses but were identified as having “elevated” blood pressure.

- **The big takeaway? Several stress-reducing techniques actually worked** — However, the effects were only seen for a short period of time. Yoga, mindfulness, tai chi, and breathing techniques consistently reduced both systolic and diastolic blood pressure. In some cases, the effects were comparable to what you’d see from some low-dose blood pressure medications.

## Different Techniques Offer Varying Results

One of the striking results they observed was that the effects on blood pressure levels differ depending on the stress technique used.<sup>6,7</sup>

- **Tai chi, yoga, meditation, and mindfulness came out on top** — Meditation led to a drop of 7.71 mm Hg, while tai chi and yoga led to a drop of 9.58 mm Hg. Mindfulness lowered blood pressure by 9.90 mm Hg.
- **Breathing techniques and psychotherapy were solid middle-tier performers** — “Compared with no intervention, breath control achieved a reduction of 6.65 mm Hg in systolic blood pressure.”<sup>8</sup> Psychotherapy led to a reduction of 9.83 mmHg.
- **Music therapy and progressive muscle relaxation had the smallest impact** — However, they still offered modest drops in both systolic and diastolic pressure. “Music was also associated with a fall of 6.61 mm Hg, [and] progressive muscle relaxation with a fall of 7.46 mm Hg,” News-Medical.net reported.<sup>9</sup>
- **Most methods worked in a short span of time** — The effects kicked in within just eight to 12 weeks in most cases. In people with diagnosed hypertension, tai chi and yoga delivered a drop in systolic pressure of 9.6 mm Hg, while those practicing mindfulness-based stress reduction saw similar results. Simply put, if your blood pressure was 140/90, these methods will bring it closer to 130/80 — enough to move you out of the danger zone. According to the researchers:

*"The results of our systematic review and network meta-analysis indicate that relaxation or stress management techniques might result in meaningful reductions in blood pressure at up to three months of follow-up."<sup>10</sup>*

- **Diastolic blood pressure also fell across the board** — On average, those practicing mindfulness or breathing control saw reductions of 3 to 7 mm Hg in diastolic pressure. Progressive muscle relaxation and music therapy had milder effects but were still statistically significant, especially when consistently practiced over several weeks.

Unfortunately, the gains didn't hold — When people stopped doing the practices, their blood pressure returned to baseline. Most of the studies only tracked results up to 12 weeks, and only a few included long-term follow-ups. So while you might get a temporary benefit, that benefit disappears once you stop making it part of your routine.

## **The Problem with High Blood Pressure Medications**

In conventional medicine, the primary treatment for high blood pressure is to take medications. Drugs for lowering blood pressure work by loosening the arterial walls, reducing the total blood in circulation and weakening the contraction of the heart. However, these drugs are linked to unpleasant and uncomfortable side effects that cause people to stop using them.

- **Blood pressure medications increase the risk of fainting by 28%** — They are notorious for causing seniors (many who have calcified arteries and, due to insufficient blood pressure, struggle with getting blood to the brain) to become lightheaded, putting them at risk of falling and other injuries.<sup>11</sup>
- **Your brain and kidneys also suffer when your blood pressure dips too low** — Taking blood pressure medications puts you at risk of acute renal injury by 18%. In individuals who have end-stage renal disease,<sup>12</sup> low blood pressure causes their risk of mortality to increase by nearly 39%.<sup>13</sup>

- **Some organs are more sensitive to the reduced blood flow, which exacerbates certain health conditions** — Your brain is one example; it needs sufficient blood to function. Having low blood pressure leads to cognitive decline.<sup>14</sup>

The good news is that lifestyle modification and mind-body interventions could be as effective as blood pressure drugs and are generally free of side effects. For example, research found that tai chi, one of the methods included in the featured study, is emerging as one of the best types of exercise to lower blood pressure, outshining even aerobics.<sup>15</sup>

## **Tai Chi Is Better Than Aerobic Exercise at Lowering Blood Pressure**

Often referred to as "meditation in motion," tai chi involves movements in which your muscles are relaxed,<sup>16</sup> your breathing is slow and deep, and your mind is focused on the present moment. Beyond enhancing strength, balance, and postural alignment, this exercise fosters improvements in concentration, relaxation, and breath control.

- **A recent study compared tai chi to aerobic exercise in people with prehypertension** — In a 2024 paper published in JAMA Network Open, researchers from the China Academy of Chinese Medical Sciences compared the effects of tai chi with aerobic exercise among 342 people with prehypertension. Participants performed four 60-minute sessions of either tai chi or aerobic exercise every week for 12 months.<sup>17</sup>
- **Tai chi produced a bigger drop in systolic blood pressure (SBP) than aerobics** — Those in the tai chi group had a significantly greater reduction in SBP compared to the aerobics group. Those performing tai chi had a 7.01 mm Hg reduction in SBP compared to 4.61 mm Hg among the aerobics group members. According to an article in Study Finds:

*"These findings were not isolated to office-measured BP. The Tai Chi group also showed superior results in 24-hour ambulatory SBP measurements, particularly during nighttime, suggesting an enduring and consistent blood pressure management effects."<sup>18</sup>*

- **Tai chi lowered blood pressure more consistently and helped more people reach a normal range** – By decreasing SBP in patients with prehypertension by 2.40 mm Hg more than aerobic exercise, tai chi is a practical way to prevent cardiovascular diseases and reduce the risk of cardiovascular events, according to the study.

Close to 22% of those practicing tai chi also had their blood pressure levels fall into the normal range, compared to 16% of those doing aerobics.<sup>19</sup>

- **Additional studies show tai chi improves more than just blood pressure** – Separate research involving 208 young and middle-aged people similarly found that doing tai chi for three months led to lower blood pressure, heart rate and cholesterol after the first month. After three months, they also had improved weight, blood sugar, heart health and quality of life.<sup>20</sup>

So what else is tai chi good for? Apparently, a whole lot more – it boosts brain health and cognitive function, protects against inflammation, and benefits a range of diseases like dementia and depression. To learn more, read [“Tai Chi Surpasses Aerobic Exercise for Lowering Blood Pressure.”](#)

## **Managing Your Stress Will Help Lower Your Blood Pressure**

If your blood pressure has been climbing, your body’s stress system is likely driving a big part of the problem. The key is to take real action that helps your nervous system reset, your blood vessels relax, and your body shift out of that high-alert survival mode.

Whether your stress comes from work, family, trauma, or just the modern pace of life, the pressure it puts on your biology is real. And the only way out of it is to take your nervous system seriously. Here are five steps to help address your stress effectively:

1. **Incorporate relaxation techniques into your lifestyle** – If your goal is to bring your blood pressure levels to normal, you need consistency. The most powerful methods are mindfulness-based stress reduction, tai chi, yoga, and slow breathing exercises. Choose one that feels doable.

I recommend starting with something simple like box breathing – inhale for four counts, hold for four, exhale for four, and hold again for four. Do this for 10 minutes every day, ideally at the same time.

- 2. Limit stimulants that keep your body stuck in fight-or-flight mode** – Caffeine, nicotine, and scrolling your phone late at night all keep your sympathetic nervous system activated, which tightens your blood vessels and raises your blood pressure. If you're relying on coffee to get through the day, that's a sign your baseline energy system is overloaded.

Cut back slowly if needed, and replace those habits with something grounding – like getting early morning sun or walking barefoot on natural ground.

- 3. Get early morning sun exposure to reset your internal stress clock** – Doing this sends a powerful reset signal to your brain, calming your HPA axis, which is the command center that controls cortisol, the stress hormone. Just five to 10 minutes of natural sunlight improves your heart rate variability and regulates your cortisol levels.

Sun exposure also allows you to optimize your vitamin D levels, a nutrient that also benefits your blood pressure levels. Read more here: [“Vitamin D Slashes Blood Pressure in Overweight Seniors.”](#)

- 4. Train your body to relax under tension** – You can't just relax on the couch and expect long-term benefits. What works better is learning how to calm yourself while your body is under low-grade stress. That's why tai chi and yoga outperformed music and passive relaxation in the research. They force your body to practice balance, breathing, and presence – all while holding tension. Start with short daily sessions, and don't worry if you're stiff or new to it.
- 5. Track your blood pressure, but also track what helps** – Buy a home cuff and check your blood pressure at the same time every day. Keeping a simple journal also allows you to connect patterns so you'll see what helps or hurts your numbers.



Once you make that connection, motivation comes naturally. You're not guessing anymore; you're guiding your own biology.

Remember, however, that stress is just one aspect, as maintaining a healthy blood pressure level requires a comprehensive approach that involves changing your diet and lifestyle habits. For more strategies to keep your blood pressure at a healthy level, read [“Wrong Arm Position During Blood Pressure Checks Leads to Hypertension Misdiagnoses.”](#)

## **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) About Relaxation Techniques for High Blood Pressure**

**Q: Do relaxation techniques really lower blood pressure?**

**A:** Yes, techniques like tai chi, yoga, mindfulness, and breathing exercises have been shown to lower both systolic and diastolic blood pressure. In many cases, the results are comparable to those of low-dose blood pressure medications — but only when practiced consistently and daily. Once these techniques are stopped, the benefits usually disappear within weeks.

**Q: How fast can I expect to see results from stress-reduction methods?**

**A:** Most people see noticeable improvements in their blood pressure within eight to 12 weeks of daily practice. For those with diagnosed hypertension, systolic pressure dropped by nearly 10 mm Hg in that time frame. That's enough to shift out of the danger zone if your numbers are borderline high.

**Q: Is tai chi better than aerobic exercise for lowering blood pressure?**

**A:** According to a 2024 study published in JAMA Network Open, tai chi outperformed traditional aerobic exercise in people with prehypertension. Tai chi

participants saw a larger drop in systolic blood pressure and were more likely to reach normal levels compared to those doing aerobics.

**Q: Why doesn't blood pressure stay down after stopping these practices?**

**A:** These relaxation techniques work by calming the sympathetic nervous system and improving blood vessel function. When you stop practicing them, your nervous system gradually returns to its previous stressed state, and your blood pressure rises again. This is why daily, long-term commitment is necessary.

**Q: What are safer alternatives to blood pressure medications?**

**A:** Tai chi, mindfulness-based stress reduction, and breath control offer natural and safer options without the side effects associated with medications. They help regulate your stress response, improve endothelial function, and promote overall cardiovascular health when practiced regularly. Pair these with sun exposure, better sleep, and eliminating vegetable oils to see deeper improvements.

## Sources and References

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- <sup>1</sup> [CDC, High Blood Pressure Facts](#)
- <sup>2</sup> [American Heart Association, Understanding Blood Pressure Readings](#)
- <sup>3</sup> [Cleveland Clinic Journal of Medicine January 2019, 86 \(1\) 47-56](#)
- <sup>4, 6</sup> [BMJ Medicine. 2025;4:e001098](#)
- <sup>5, 7, 8, 9, 10</sup> [News-Medical.Net, April 9, 2025](#)
- <sup>11, 12</sup> [BMJ 2021; 372, February 10, 2021](#)
- <sup>13</sup> [Clin J Am Soc Nephrol. 2009 Apr;4\(4\):830–837](#)
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