

# Dr. Marlene's NATURAL HEALTH CONNECTIONS

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## Blood Pressure Control: What Matters Most

**Whether you take blood-pressure drugs, have been told by your doctor to do so, or want to maintain healthy blood pressure naturally, these are the most important things to do.**



One of the biggest reasons people have come to see me over the years is to get off or avoid having to take blood-pressure drugs. To do this, it's important to understand the bigger blood-pressure picture.

The fact is, the whole subject of blood pressure is sorely misunderstood. High blood pressure is viewed as a medical condition when it's really a sign, or marker, that something is awry.

Believe it or not, in today's conventional medical system, the causes of high blood pressure are unknown in 90 to 95 percent of cases.<sup>1</sup> The rest may be the result of kidney disease, an overactive thyroid, a disease of the adrenal glands such as Cushing's syndrome, or a side effect of certain drugs.

So, why is high blood pressure so mysterious? I can't emphasize this enough: High blood pressure is a *sign* that something is not well. And the solution starts with an investigation to find the trigger or

triggers for each individual. Our conventional healthcare system is not well equipped to do this.

My job in seeing patients with high blood pressure is that of a detective. That's how the underlying triggers of the condition get discovered.

I love my detective role. It's very rewarding to help someone pinpoint what is affecting their health in a detrimental way — such as raising blood pressure — and then working out how to change that situation to enhance their health.

And then, as they follow the steps that are right for them, they experience various improvements in their health and life. And their blood pressure goes down.

Since you and I are not sitting down together to examine your situation, I'm going to give you the nuts

**IN THE NEXT ISSUE:**  
**Medical Tests: Which**  
**Ones Do You Really Need?**



and bolts of my detective process: What to look for in your own diet, lifestyle habits, and environment to enable you to do your own investigating. Then you can be your own detective and discover the steps that will help *you* gain control of your blood pressure.

## Detective Training 101

Here's a vital thing to know: High blood pressure doesn't just show up out of the blue. It becomes elevated for a reason, usually over

a period of time. I want you to become a good detective in relation to your own health — to find what causes your blood pressure to go up or down.

With that in mind, I must warn you: You have to be totally honest with yourself and be willing to take a new look at how you eat, your daily habits, and possibly your environment.

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## Did You Know?

A recent Swedish study found that responses to any blood-pressure drug can vary significantly from one person to another, so it would be best to personalize prescriptions. But so far, the only way to tell if one drug will work better than another for a given individual is by trial and error.<sup>2</sup>

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Things that influence blood pressure are not always obvious at first glance. An experience of one of my patients is an example of what I mean.

This patient started to have blood-pressure problems after moving into a new home. Her diet was good, she was physically active, she didn't take any medications, and her life wasn't especially stressful.

Her new home — literally new construction — was one she had dreamed of and had been very happy to move into. But then, she started feeling inexplicably tired and mentally foggy, and her blood pressure went up. Blood tests showed that her level of inflammation was abnormally high.

When I asked her if there could be mold in her home, she was appalled at the thought. “No way, the house is only a few months old!” I knew from her expression

that the idea seemed ludicrous, bordering on offensive.

I changed the subject and later during the visit, I expressed an interest in her new home, how long it took to build, how it was designed, and so on. And lo and behold, it turned out that there were some severe storms during construction, delaying completion.

Long story short, there was water damage that had been concealed. Part of the house was, in fact, moldy. And my patient was sensitive to the mold. Once the mold was removed, her symptoms disappeared and her blood pressure dropped back to normal.

Another one of my patients with high blood pressure was taking a blood-pressure medication and had a tooth that had been infected for a long time. It took quite a bit of encouragement and gentle prodding to get him to see a dentist but once he finally did and the infected tooth was treated, he no longer needed the medication.

If I hadn't pursued these issues, they would have been overlooked. The moral of the story: You can solve health mysteries by being a good detective, like Columbo in that classic TV series.

## Blood Pressure Triggers

Although the exact triggers of high blood pressure are unique to each individual, I've found that they fall into four major categories: high blood sugar, lack of physical activity, inflammation, and stress.

I'm going to describe how these work and different scenarios that can contribute to each one. Be prepared to keep an open mind and to take a fresh look at the points I'll discuss. Usually, not all the points

Dr. Marlene's

## NATURAL HEALTH CONNECTIONS

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will apply, but one or more will.

The trick is to take a thorough look at your diet and other factors I'll talk about. And be willing to make changes.

### Trigger #1: Blood Sugar

Diabetes is known to increase risk for hypertension. In fact, nearly three out of four adults with diabetes have high blood pressure.<sup>3</sup>

But the same mechanism also makes blood pressure rise in people who aren't diabetics but have slightly elevated blood sugar. In my years of practice, elevated blood sugar has been an underlying trigger in 80 percent of the patients

I've seen with high blood pressure.

If you don't have diabetes but your fasting blood sugar level is 100 mg/dL or higher or your A1c is 5.7 or higher, your first priority is to eat a low-carb diet to get blood sugar down. This also applies if your numbers are borderline: fasting blood sugar close to 100 mg/dL and A1c close to 5.7.<sup>4</sup>

Both these tests should be part of the blood tests done during your annual check-up. Make sure they are included. And if you haven't had a routine physical for years, I suggest getting one now, so that you know where you stand.

A low-carb diet is also the first

priority if you have type 2 diabetes. The more you can lower your blood sugar with diet, the better. You may be able to eliminate the need for diabetes and blood-pressure drugs or at least get dosages reduced, and you will face less risk for diabetes complications.

My low-carb diet is described in detail in earlier newsletter issues that are listed in *Related to This Topic* on page 7. I recommend the same diet if your blood-pressure numbers are normal but your blood sugar is elevated. In fact, this is a diet with a lot of flexibility, with no excluded food groups, and it's a healthy, sustainable way of eating in the long term.

Getting and keeping your blood sugar in a normal range this way will also help to prevent blood pressure from rising in the future and will help with other health issues.

### What About Salt?

Salt is an essential mineral that has been unnecessarily demonized. Most high blood pressure is not caused by salt. But processed food, our top source of sodium, is not healthy. Aim to eat fresh food, prepared from scratch, instead.

For more details on salt myths and facts, I encourage you to check out an earlier newsletter issue: *The Top 3 Killer Myths about Blood Pressure*, listed in *Related to This Topic* on page 7.

### Trigger #2: Lack of Physical Activity

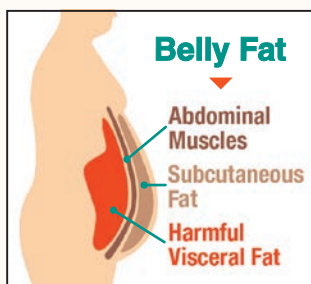
Physical activity strengthens the heart, improves circulation, and helps to lower both blood sugar and blood pressure. Any activity that gets your heart pumping, as well as resistance training, is beneficial.<sup>5</sup>

## The Role of Insulin

There's a process that leads to elevated blood sugar. When there's an overload of carbs, more blood sugar is produced. In an effort to get this blood sugar used for energy and maintain normal levels in the blood, the body produces extra insulin. And for a while, blood sugar stays in a normal range. If the carb overload continues, eventually, extra insulin can't cope anymore and blood sugar rises.

Here's the important point: When insulin is elevated, even if tests show normal blood-sugar levels, the high insulin will produce inflammation. In addition, high insulin leads to sodium retention, which causes fluid retention and swelling, and elevates blood pressure.

Elevated insulin also leads to harmful fat storage in the abdominal area, both in people who are visibly overweight and in those who appear thin. The harmful type of fat (visceral fat) is not superficial belly fat (subcutaneous fat)



that you can pinch. The damaging visceral fat lies beneath the abdominal muscles, deep within the abdominal area and it surrounds all the organs in that part of your body.

Visceral fat is inflammatory and contributes to high blood pressure, diabetes, and other health issues. A large waist is a telltale sign.

### Should You Worry About Insulin?

To keep things simple, I suggest focusing on eating a low-carb diet of fresh foods, with plenty of vegetables, which will keep your blood sugar in a healthy range. This will help to keep insulin levels in a healthier range as well.

Insulin levels are not measured in routine health check-ups, other than for diabetics using insulin. But if your blood-sugar numbers are good and you want to be more proactive about your health, you can request a fasting insulin test. An optimal fasting insulin level is below 6 mIU/mL (microunits per milliliter).



My mother's experience is a good example of how this can work. Before the pandemic, she was active, regularly going for walks and hikes, and her blood pressure was normal. But this changed during lockdowns, and her blood pressure went up.

While we were all told to stay home, she got into the habit of sitting on the couch and watching TV for hours on end, and she got out of shape. Her heart got weak and she started to retain water — her ankles became swollen.

A weak heart can't pump well, so fluid accumulates and leads to swelling. This puts more pressure on blood vessels, and blood pressure rises.

Once she was able to come and visit us, I saw what had happened and got her walking again. She got back in shape, her heart got stronger, the swelling disappeared, and her blood pressure dropped back to normal.

I know, simple as this sounds, it's harder to do if you aren't used to regular exercise. But it's one of those things that needs to be done. And you might be surprised by how much better it makes you feel.

### Trigger #3: Inflammation

Eating a low-carb diet to control blood sugar and getting regular physical activity are the first steps to take for healthy blood pressure. Inflammation is the next thing to consider.<sup>6</sup>

Inflammation may be a major trigger of high blood pressure or a contributing factor.<sup>7</sup> In either case, the inflammation can keep your blood pressure high despite a healthy diet and exercise, and that's when you need to be a

detective to determine what's really happening.

Chronic inflammation can be triggered by a number of causes. These, I've found, are the most common ones:

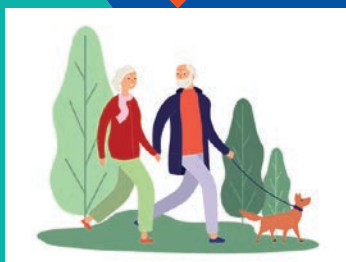
**Food intolerances:** Even with a low-carb diet, intolerances to certain foods can trigger

inflammation that raises blood pressure. Gluten, dairy, and eggs are the most common foods that trigger a reaction.

If you suspect that one or more of these are causing a problem for you, eliminate it from your diet for at least a few weeks, see how you feel, and track your blood pressure. And if you know that

## Many Ways to Exercise

Physical activity can be enjoyable rather than a dreaded chore. Try one or more of these:



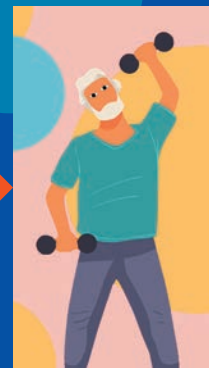
**WALK WITH FRIENDS**



**JOIN AN EXERCISE CLASS**



**TRY YOGA OR TAI CHI**



**LIFT SOME WEIGHTS**

Many health plans offer free fitness classes for older adults. And if you'd rather go for a walk by yourself, there's no time like the present to get started.



**LEARN EXERCISES ONLINE**

you react badly to a certain food, be sure to abstain from it. I cover food intolerances in more detail in an earlier newsletter issue, listed in *Related to This Topic* on page 7.

**Infections:** Any type of infection triggers inflammation. I've found that dental, urinary, and sinus infections are the most common ones that are untreated or are ineffectively treated. And no matter what else you do, the inflammation from the infection can keep your blood pressure elevated — until the infection is resolved.

**Chronic pain:** Sometimes, chronic pain develops after an injury, such as a sprained ankle that hasn't been effectively treated, and at other times it can be a chronic condition such as arthritis. The inflammation from chronic pain will persist until it is addressed.

I once had a patient who was resisting knee replacement surgery, even though she was constantly in pain, and her blood pressure was high. Once she got the surgery, her blood pressure dropped to normal.

**Sleep problems:** Lack of sufficient or restful sleep increases the odds of high blood pressure and must be corrected. Sleep apnea can be a major trigger<sup>8</sup> and most people who suffer from it deny that a problem exists. Sleep apnea damages circulation and contributes to high blood sugar and insulin. Check the earlier issue about sleep, listed in *Related to This Topic* on page 7, for how to deal with sleep problems.

**Mold:** Remember the patient I described earlier whose blood pressure went up after she moved into

a new home with hidden mold? In addition to elevated blood pressure, mold exposure can trigger chronic inflammation, headaches or other pain, difficulty getting good sleep, exhaustion, and other debilitating symptoms.<sup>9</sup>

Individual sensitivity to mold varies, so one person in a household may be affected while others are not. Where it's a problem, mold has to be removed. Spraying with a chemical to "kill" it will make things worse — see the earlier issue about mold, listed in *Related to This Topic* on page 7.

### Trigger #4: Stress

I sometimes see people cringe when I mention stress because it seems like such a general concept and you can't take a pill to reduce it. You have to actually do something to control stressful situations. But stress can be a trigger of high blood pressure.<sup>10</sup>

Stress can be physical. When you eat a high-carb diet or foods you can't tolerate, you don't get enough sleep, or you are in pain, those are all forms of physical stress that needs to be dealt with.

Other stress triggers — which most people think of at the mention of stress — are things that are going on in our lives. For example, my blood pressure went up during the height of the pandemic lockdowns.

Dealing with such situations can require managing time, personal relationships, work, or other activities in our lives. The right solution is different for each person but it needs to be worked out.

### Blood-Pressure Drugs: Pros and Cons

In discussing blood-pressure drugs, my intent is simply to give you some information, not to demonize these drugs. High blood pressure increases

### About Dr. Marlene

Dr. Marlene Merritt's passion for natural medicine is fueled by her drive to help others and by her own experience of overcoming a debilitating heart condition, diagnosed at the age of 20. A competitive cyclist at the time, she suddenly began experiencing severe chest pains. Forced to quit the sport, she suffered from fatigue and chest pain for another 15 years, despite doing everything that conventional, Western medical doctors told her to do.

And then, the tide turned. A physician trained in naturopathic healing recommended a whole-food vitamin E supplement. A week after starting the supplement regimen, her energy began to return, and the pain began to disappear.

Dr. Marlene is a Doctor of Oriental Medicine, has a Master's degree and is board-certified in Nutrition, and is board-certified in Functional Medicine. She is certified in the Bredesen MEND Protocol™, a groundbreaking method of addressing Alzheimer's disease, and is a Proficiency Diplomate in the Shoemaker CIRS protocol for treatment of mold-related illness. She is the author of *Smart Blood Sugar* and *The Blood Pressure Solution*, and co-author of *The Perfect Sleep Solution*. After 31 years in private clinical practice, she now focuses on writing and educating health professionals and consumers to reach more people and positively impact their health.



risks for stroke, heart attack, chronic kidney disease, and vascular disease. Depending on the situation, the health benefits of taking a medication to lower blood pressure may well outweigh the downside of its side effects. And sometimes, these drugs may literally be lifesavers.

Different types of blood-pressure drugs work through different mechanisms. Below, I've summarized pros and cons of some of the main types and some of the brand and generic names.

### Diuretics: Loop and Thiazide

**Drug names:** Loop diuretics include Bumex (bumetanide), Edecrin (ethacrynic acid), and Lasix (furosemide). Thiazide diuretics include hydrochlorothiazide (HCTZ), chlorothalidone, and indapamide.

**Pros:** Also called “water pills,” diuretics help to eliminate fluid. This lowers blood pressure by reducing the volume of fluid in blood vessels.

**Cons:** They deplete magnesium, potassium, zinc, and vitamin B1. Low magnesium and potassium can contribute to high blood pressure and can affect heart rhythm. Loop diuretics decrease calcium and thiazide diuretics increase calcium.

The drugs can cause kidney damage over time and have the side effect of dehydration, which can cause muscle cramps, dizziness, or headaches.

### Diuretics: Potassium Sparing

**Drug names:** Midamor (amiloride), Inspra (eplerenone), Aldactone, Carospir (spironolactone), and Dyrenium (triamterene).

**Pros:** These diuretics also lower blood pressure by reducing fluid volume in blood vessels. However, they prevent the loss of potassium.

**Cons:** They deplete folate and zinc. They can cause kidney damage over time and, like other diuretics, have the side effect of dehydration, which can cause muscle cramps, dizziness, or headaches.

### ACE Inhibitors

**Drug names:** Zestril (lisinopril), Vasotec (enalapril), and Lotensin (benazepril).

**Pros:** ACE inhibitors lower blood pressure by blocking an internal mechanism that constricts blood vessels. The “A” in “ACE” stands for “angiotensin” a chemical the body produces that narrows arteries. ACE inhibitors block internal production of this chemical, helping blood vessels to open up and relax.

**Cons:** A persistent cough is a notable side effect. ACE inhibitors deplete potassium and zinc. Low potassium can contribute to high blood pressure and heart arrhythmia.

### ARBs (Angiotensin II Receptor Blockers)

**Drug names:** Avapro (irbesartan), Benicar (olmesartan), Cozaar (losartan), and Diovan (valsartan).

**Pros:** Like ACE inhibitors, ARBs open up and relax blood vessels by influencing angiotensin, but they work in a different way. Rather than blocking production of angiotensin (as ACE inhibitors do), ARBs stop angiotensin from binding with blood vessels, thereby inhibiting its effect. ARBs are given to people who do not tolerate

ACE inhibitors, to lower blood pressure and protect the heart.

**Cons:** ARBs deplete magnesium and zinc. They can damage kidneys and can cause irregular heartbeat, cough, dizziness, confusion, and diarrhea.

### Beta-blockers

**Drug names:** Lopressor (metoprolol tartrate), Toprol XL (metoprolol succinate), Bystolic (nebivolol), Coreg (carvedilol), Tenormin (atenolol), and Inderal (propranolol).

**Pros:** These lower blood pressure by reducing heart rate, which lowers the heart's workload and its output of blood. They also reduce anxiety.

**Cons:** The drugs deplete CoQ10 and melatonin. They prevent the heart from speeding up, making it difficult to exercise, and they slow metabolism, causing weight gain. They weaken the heart over time.

### Calcium Channel Blockers

**Drug names:** Norvasc (amlodipine), Cardizem, Tiazac, Tiazac XC (diltiazem hydrochloride), Plendil (felodipine), Adalat XL (nifedipine XL), and Isonitin, Isonitin SR, Verelan (verapamil hydrochloride).

**Pros:** These prevent calcium from entering muscle cells of the heart and arteries, thereby making the heart's contractions less forceful and decreasing its workload. They also reduce heart rate and help narrowed blood vessels to open up and relax. These effects lower blood pressure.

**Cons:** The drugs deplete potassium. Low potassium can contribute to high blood pressure



and to heart arrhythmia. They will weaken the heart over time.

Getting Off Blood-Pressure Drugs

Diet and lifestyle changes can reduce or eliminate the need for medication. That’s something that many of my patients have been able to do once the underlying cause of their hypertension was detected and corrected.

If you take one or more blood-pressure medications, check your blood pressure daily and keep a record of your readings. Once you identify changes you need to make and start making them, your blood pressure will go down. And then, you need to show your readings to your doctor, explain what you’ve been doing differently, and get your drug dosage adjusted as needed.

If you’ve been told that you should take a blood-pressure medication but would rather not, here are a few things to keep in

mind: A diagnosis of hypertension means that blood pressure has been consistently high, such as in two or more doctor visits. If you get nervous when seeing the doctor, measure your blood pressure at home and if it isn’t high, show your doctor your readings. This will prevent “white coat hypertension.”

Following the steps I’ve outlined will help to prevent the need for medications. And if your blood pressure is in a healthy range, the same steps will help to maintain it at a healthy level.

Doctors generally don’t spend a lot of time talking about how to lower your blood pressure without prescription medications.

One reason is that conventional medical education doesn’t provide much information on this topic. Another is that the healthcare system doesn’t allow enough time during office visits to do the type of detective work that’s needed.

Nevertheless, your doctor will most likely be happy — and probably surprised — to see your blood pressure drop as a result of diet and lifestyle changes. It isn’t a common occurrence, although it should be.

A Final Word

If you take a blood-pressure medication, supplements can correct nutrient depletions.

You can take a multivitamin with around 100 percent of the main vitamins and zinc. Mix a powdered magnesium supplement into a bottle of water and sip it throughout the day. CoQ10 comes in a separate supplement. And to get enough potassium, eat plenty of fresh vegetables.

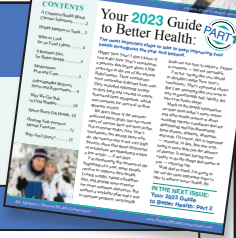
A low-carb diet and regular physical activity are the top two steps to start with. If that doesn’t solve your blood-pressure issues, put on your detective hat and thoroughly check all the other points I’ve discussed. And do what is necessary to address your personal blood-pressure triggers.

### Related to This Topic

These are some earlier issues of this newsletter that address related topics:

Related Topic	Volume	Issue	Title
A Healthy Diet	6	1	Your 2023 Guide to Better Health: Part 1
A Healthy Diet	6	2	Your 2023 Guide to Better Health: Part 2
Supplements	4	6	Top Blood Pressure Supplements and How to Use Them
Food Intolerances	4	12	Food Sensitivities: Hidden Triggers of Many Health Conditions
The Salt Myth	1	2	The Top 3 Killer Myths about Blood Pressure
Joint Health	2	5	The 90-Day Program to Relieve Arthritis
Stress	4	6	How to Conquer Hidden Stress (page 8)
Sleep	5	4	Restful Sleep: How to Get Enough
Mold	2	11	Mold: The Hidden Trigger of More Than 40 Ailments

Access these online by logging in to [www.NaturalHealthConnections.com](http://www.NaturalHealthConnections.com).



1 Alexander, M.R., et al. "Hypertension." Medscape. 2022 Nov 9. <https://emedicine.medscape.com/article/241381-overview>

2 Sundström, J., et al. "Heterogeneity in Blood Pressure Response to 4 Antihypertensive Drugs: A Randomized Clinical Trial." JAMA. 2023 Apr 11;329(14):1160-1169.

3 Naha, S., et al. "Hypertension in Diabetes." Endotext [Internet]. Feingold, K.R., et al., editors. South Dartmouth (MA): MDText.com, Inc. Last update: August 7, 2021.

4 Yan, Q., et al. "Association of blood glucose level and hypertension in Elderly Chinese Subjects: a community based study." BMC Endocr Disord. 2016 Jul 13;16(1):40.

5 Carpio-Rivera, E., et al. "Acute Effects of Exercise on Blood Pressure: A Meta-Analytic Investigation." Arq Bras Cardiol. 2016 May; 106(5): 422-433.

6 Xiao, L., et al. "Inflammation in Hypertension." Can J Cardiol. 2020 May; 36(5): 635-647.

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8 Makarem, N., et al. "Effect of Sleep Disturbances on Blood Pressure." Hypertension. 2021 Apr;77(4):1036-1046.

9 Tuominen, T., et al. "Severe Sequelae to Mold-Related Illness as Demonstrated in Two Finnish Cohorts." Front Immunol. 2017 Apr 3;8:382.

10 Spruill, T.M. "Chronic Psychosocial Stress and Hypertension." Curr Hypertens Rep. 2010 Feb; 12(1): 10-16.

# Is Erythritol Really Dangerous?

I know that many of you are working on reducing sugar in your diets to achieve and maintain healthy blood-sugar levels, and sugar substitutes can be very helpful. However, a recent study produced some alarming headlines — and questions — about erythritol, a widely used sugar alternative. So, I thought it best to dive deeper into the facts.

As often happens, the headlines painted an inaccurate picture. In fact, the authors of the study drew a faulty conclusion. Let me explain.

## How the Study Was Flawed

Researchers analyzed blood samples of several thousand people in the United States and Europe and found that those with the highest levels of erythritol in their blood had greater risk of heart attack, stroke, and death. The conclusion was that consuming erythritol as a sweetener raises health risks.<sup>1</sup>

This *sounds like* evidence that erythritol is a harmful sweetener. But a closer look reveals some faulty logic.

1. The human body produces erythritol internally. So, how do you know if erythritol levels stem from internal production or from consuming erythritol as a sweetener? You don't.
2. The blood samples that researchers analyzed were taken years ago, before erythritol was widely used as a sweetener. So, you can't assume that the sweetener was the source of elevated erythritol — yet that's what the study suggested and the headlines led you to believe.
3. The connection between erythritol and health risks was a *correlation*. This means that the two things were associated, but it doesn't prove that one caused the other. Perhaps internally produced erythritol rises when there are other harmful changes in the body that increase health risks. We don't know. The study did not look at this point, and it is not related to sweetener intake.

I want to delve into “correlation” a bit more because it comes up in many studies. Correlation doesn't prove that one thing causes the other.

If you eat oatmeal one morning instead of your

usual eggs and then get a flat tire on the way to work, does this mean the oatmeal caused the flat tire? Of course not, but you could say there is a *correlation*.

Someone who is superstitious may conclude that they should stick with eggs for breakfast. But that's purely superstition — not science.

Bottom line, this recent study and alarming headlines about erythritol did not show that the sweetener harms health.



## Did You Know?

In addition to being produced internally by the human body, erythritol occurs naturally in small quantities in some fruits, such as watermelons, grapes, peaches, and pears; in fermented foods such as soy sauce, miso bean paste, beer, and wine; and in mushrooms.

## Natural Sugar Substitutes

I've always recommended stevia, monk fruit, and xylitol as sweeteners. Erythritol is another alternative, and it's often added to stevia to make a powdered sweetener that works well in single-serve packets or for baking.

Unlike sugar, these don't raise insulin or blood sugar, which helps to prevent inflammation, diabetes, heart disease, and other ills. And such sweeteners aren't harmful.

I use stevia or xylitol to sweeten beverages and some homemade desserts. Stevia is about 300 times sweeter than sugar, so you need only a very small amount. Some people don't like its aftertaste, but I've found that this is less likely to be a problem with liquid stevia.

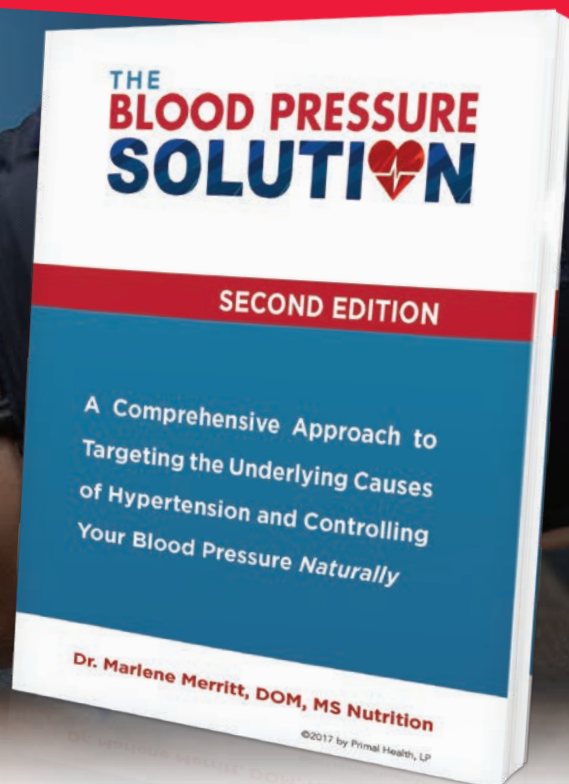
You can use naturally flavored liquid stevia in sparkling water, coffee, or tea. Sweetleaf, for example, comes in many flavors, such as vanilla, chocolate, caramel, pumpkin spice, hazelnut, and others. But there are many brands.

Some people prefer the taste of monk fruit. And for baking, granulated versions of monk fruit or xylitol work well. Xylitol is also used in toothpaste and mouthwash, as it helps to prevent tooth decay. However, be aware that xylitol is toxic to dogs.

<sup>1</sup> Witkowski, M., et al. "The artificial sweetener erythritol and cardiovascular event risk." *Nat Med*. 2023 Mar;29(3):710-718.



# Get Dr. Marlene's Best-Selling Book... **Blood Pressure Solution!**



**Dr. Marlene has been sounding the alarm about dangerous blood pressure drugs for the last 15 years — and offering a safe, natural alternative.**

She has worked with hundreds of patients who were suffering high blood pressure—many were taking two, three, even four medications and going through awful side effects...

Just like Kathleen Kelly, whose ankles swelled up from the prescription blood pressure drugs she was taking. She also suffered an awful cough from using Lisinopril. By the time she read Dr. Marlene's best-selling book, **Blood Pressure Solution**, Kathleen's doctor had her on three blood pressure medicines combined—and her blood pressure was still high!

"My patients are always surprised to see how easy it is to use my natural Blood Pressure Solution," said Dr. Marlene. "The diet is not restrictive. Many of the foods you thought were taboo are perfectly ok—like steak is ok, butter is ok, natural sea salt is ok, even several carb foods are good. Part of the solution is to get good fats into your diet."

After reading **Blood Pressure Solution**, Kathleen made simple lifestyle changes found in the book and began to see immediate results...

***"My blood pressure came down right away...I just feel great. I'm ecstatic. I go around telling everybody I found the fountain of youth. I have much more energy now. My concentration and focus are better. I can walk around my block without getting winded anymore. I am 100% off my medication."***

Did you see that? Kathleen reports she is 100% off her medications. And so can you!

Yes! You too can be off these anti-hypertensive drugs... maintain blood pressure in the normal range... and feel good again!

Dr. Marlene Merritt's **Blood Pressure Solution** is working for people all across America. And she believes it can work for you, too. Here's how...

Dr. Marlene originally developed her unique solution for her patients at the Merritt Wellness Center in Austin, Texas. And after seeing just how successful it was for people in her own community—she decided to put her entire natural solution, with step-by-step guidance, into an easy-to-use book called, **Blood Pressure Solution**.

This is a comprehensive approach to targeting the underlying causes of hypertension and controlling your blood pressure naturally.

Dr. Marlene's book has been sweeping the country with over 330,000 copies sold in the U.S., and even 32,000 copies shipped overseas.

So, are you ready to bring your blood pressure back to the normal range? Gain more energy? Drop a few unwanted pounds? And feel better than you have in years, just as Kathleen did?

Great! Get your copy of Dr. Marlene's best-selling book, **Blood Pressure Solution** today! Go to the website listed below, and you'll see a complete review of the book, watch videos from people just like Kathleen and order your copy of **Blood Pressure Solution**!

**Get Your Copy Today! Go To:**  
**[www.PrimalLabs.com/BPS](http://www.PrimalLabs.com/BPS)**

# Vacations Are Good for You

Do you have any vacations planned this summer? Believe it or not, vacations are an often overlooked way to not only have some fun but also to enhance your health. Yet, a Pew Research Center survey of 5,188 American employees found that nearly half typically take less time off than their employer offers.

Some don't feel that they need all that time off. Others worry about falling behind at work or burdening co-workers with extra tasks during their absence.

If you're among those who skip vacations, here are some research findings to consider:

- Taking a vacation can make you feel happier and reduce stress.
- It can enhance your sleep, heart health, mental focus, and immune function.
- Vacations of any length are beneficial — even a few days, such as a long weekend, especially if you take such breaks multiple times during the year.<sup>1</sup>



Bottom line, if you have a chance to take a vacation, even a brief one, it's a good idea to take advantage of the opportunity. If budget is a concern, consider a trip to your closest national or state park. Helpful websites include [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov) and [www.americasstateparks.org](http://www.americasstateparks.org).

## Music Slows Brain Aging

Learning to play a musical instrument or listening to music enhances mental function and helps to preserve gray matter in the brain, according to a recent Swiss study of 132 seniors between the ages of 62 and 78.<sup>2</sup>

Participants, who were not trained musicians, received lessons in music awareness or playing the piano. Music awareness involved listening to music while learning to identify different instruments and



music styles. Each class lasted an hour, and those in the study were assigned 30 minutes of daily homework.

At the end of six months of training, brain scans showed improvement in both groups but more so among the piano players. And people in both groups improved their skills and memory. If you ever wanted to play a musical instrument, it's never too late to learn.

## Full-Fat Yogurt Is Best

When it comes to yogurt, I've always recommended full-fat rather than low- or nonfat versions, and there is plenty of evidence to support this. But various health organizations have continued to recommend low- or nonfat versions of dairy foods. So, I was pleased to see a new study that adds to the evidence that dairy fat is not a demon.

The study, at the University of Vermont in Burlington, compared the effects of nonfat and full-fat yogurts in a group of prediabetics between the ages of 45 and 75.<sup>3</sup> And it concluded that full-fat yogurt was more beneficial than nonfat yogurt in helping to lower blood sugar. Researchers noted that their findings are part of a growing body of research that contradicts recom-

mendations from health authorities to eat low- and nonfat dairy products.

### Why Full-Fat Is Healthier

Milk, which is fermented to make yogurt, contains lactose, a type of sugar that our bodies process in the same way as table sugar. The lactose is in the watery part of milk, not in the fat. When fat is removed, what's left in the milk — from which yogurt is made — contains a higher percentage of lactose: the milk sugar. So, low- and nonfat milks are higher in carbs that raise blood sugar.

If you don't easily tolerate yogurt or other dairy products, don't eat them. Full-fat coconut yogurt is an option. And avoid flavored versions as these typically contain added carbs.



<sup>1</sup> Hruska, B., et al. "Vacation frequency is associated with metabolic syndrome and symptoms." *Psychol Health*. 2020 Jan;35(1):1-15. <sup>2</sup> Marie, D., et al. "Music interventions in 132 healthy older adults enhance cerebellar grey matter and auditory working memory, despite general brain atrophy." *Neuroimage: Reports*. 2023 June;3(2):100166. <sup>3</sup> Taormina, V., et al. "Fat Isn't Necessarily Bad! Full-fat Yogurt Helps Lower Glucose Levels in People with Prediabetes." Presented at the annual meeting of the American Physiological Society, Long Beach, California. April 20–23, 2023.



# TAKE COLLAGEN PEPTIDES FOR Smooth and Comfortable Aging



When you're young, you have collagen galore. You can run, jump and bend with ease. But as you age you steadily lose it. And then you begin to have problems.

Starting at age 25, you lose 1% to 2% of your collagen each year. And at the same time your body's natural collagen production steadily declines.

By the time you're 55 or 60, your levels are significantly reduced, and you're making very little new collagen.

This shortfall sets the stage for the ailments we associate with aging—achy joints, weak bones and muscles, stiff arteries, and wrinkled and sagging skin.

Low levels of collagen can also cause leaky gut and digestive issues. That's because the lining of your intestines rely on collagen for structural integrity. The same is true for your arteries.

## Why you need more collagen

Collagen is essential to your mobility, your muscle strength, and your joint comfort. It's also the key to smooth and flexible arteries. Youthful looking skin. Stronger hair and nails. And a healthy digestive system.

In fact, it makes up 75% of your skin. 80% of your ligaments. 90% of your tendons. 67% of your cartilage. And 30% of your bones.

Think of it as the glue that holds everything together. If you don't have enough, the whole system starts to break down.

Fortunately, there's an easy way to get the replacement collagen you need every day.

## Introducing Primal Labs *Collagen Peptides*.

This high-collagen nutritional supplement is unflavored and mixes easily in water, tea, juice, soup and, of course, smoothies.

Each serving of **Collagen Peptides**...

- Provides 12.2 grams of high quality collagen from 3 sustainable sources, all non-GMO!
- Hydrolyzed for easy absorption and fast digestion
- Keto-friendly with no sugar and zero carbs
- Mixes clump-free in hot or cold beverages

Primal Labs **Collagen Peptides** is ideal for replacing the collagen you've lost. **And right now, you can try our superior product at 20% off with a 100% money back guarantee.**

Please try Primal Labs **Collagen Peptides** risk-free for 60 days and see for yourself just how great the benefits are!

You don't have to be unhappy with what you see in the mirror. Or hindered by aches and pains. We've got your solution to graceful aging, right here...



**Get 20% Off Today  
Through This Special Link:  
[www.PrimalSpecials.com/Collagen](http://www.PrimalSpecials.com/Collagen)**



# Q&A

**Q: Should I count the carbs in squash such as spaghetti squash? The list of carbs to count doesn't mention squash. — John E.**

**A:** There's no need to count carbs in squash and I'll explain why.



But first, for anyone who is not familiar with my list, it's a list of foods to track for their carb content. The only vegetables on that list are white potatoes and sweet potatoes. I don't recommend counting carbs in any other vegetables.

Here's why: The list includes the main carb-rich foods that, in excess, contribute to type 2 diabetes and other health problems.

I've been asked many times if carbs should be counted in squash, as well as carrots and beets — whose carb content is on the higher end among vegetables. And the answer is that you don't need to count carbs in any of these.

People don't get diabetes from eating too much squash or too many carrots or beets. But potatoes are a different story: Who can eat just a few chips or fries?

Squash, carrots, and beets have not been turned into fast foods and snacks that are carefully formulated by very smart scientists to make your body crave them in endless quantities.

Patients have never told me: "I eat a big bowl of carrots (or beets or squash) every day; once I start, I can't stop." If that was true, I

would have put those vegetables on the list of carbs to count.

There is one way that carrots and beets can be converted into unnaturally high-carb items: by juicing. It takes more than one pound of carrots to make a cup of carrot juice. So, if you drink vegetable juices, do count the carbs in the juices. I hope that answers your question.

If you're wondering about corn — which is high in carbs — it's a grain, not a vegetable. And carbs in all corn foods — including corn kernels, corn on the cob, corn chips, and popcorn — *do* need to be counted and limited. The same applies to foods made from other grains.

The complete list of carbs to count and a description of my diet can be found in the first newsletter issue listed in *Related to This Topic* on page 7.

**Q: I've been hearing a lot about different probiotic supplements. Do you recommend taking a probiotic? — Marina O.**

**A:** Sometimes probiotic supplements are helpful, but at other times they are not. Probiotic formulations vary a great deal, as do individual needs.

I generally ask two questions: Have you been taking probiotics? If so, do they help?

If the answer to both questions is "yes," then continuing to take them can be beneficial. Otherwise, the supplement may not be needed. Sometimes, taking extremely high doses of probiotic supplements can lead to bacterial overgrowth.

When you consume probiotics, in fermented foods or supple-

ments, they briefly stay in the digestive tract and help, and then they are eliminated. But if you also consume prebiotics — food for beneficial bacteria — some of those probiotics will stay in the gut and keep enhancing digestion.

Prebiotics are different types of fibers in plant foods that feed gut bacteria. Some good sources include onions, garlic, dandelion greens, and Jerusalem artichokes, along with a variety of vegetables.

For probiotics, we should be eating foods that are fermented in the traditional way. For example, sauerkraut and pickles should be described as "cultured" on labels.

Antibiotics kill both harmful and beneficial bacteria and can alter the native populations of the gut for years. Taking a probiotic supplement while taking antibiotics can help to reduce some of this damage. However, the best way to revive and maintain the native populations is by regularly consuming probiotics and prebiotics in food.

## Do you have a question for Dr. Marlene?

Send your health-related questions to [drmarlene@naturalhealthconnections.com](mailto:drmarlene@naturalhealthconnections.com). Please include your first name and the initial of your last name. Although she cannot answer each question directly, Dr. Marlene will select a few in each newsletter and will address other questions and concerns in articles in future issues. Answers are intended for educational purposes only and should not be viewed as medical advice. If you need help with your subscription or have questions about Primal Health supplements, email [support@primalhealthlp.com](mailto:support@primalhealthlp.com) or call 877-300-7849.