Squeezing your way to lower blood pressure

A simple hand exercise could help you lower your blood pressure without drugs.

A hand grip designed to keep fighter pilots from blacking out during sharp turns and steep dives has an interesting therapeutic benefit on the ground—lowering blood pressure without medication. Squeezing the grip for a few minutes a day has shown to lower blood pressure as much as a first-line anti-hypertension drug. How it does this is still something of a medical mystery.

From air to earth

Thirty years ago, the U.S. Air Force asked Dr. Ronald Wiley, an expert in heart and lung physiology, to find a way to keep fighter pilots from losing consciousness when flying the new F-16 fighter. This jet could accelerate so fast that the G-forces it generated made it difficult for the pilot's heart to pump blood to the brain, causing vision problems, trouble thinking, and blackouts. One of Wiley's strategies was a hand grip that pilots could squeeze to boost their blood pressure enough to maintain circulation to the brain.

As he worked with pilots, he was struck by a contradiction—those who practiced with the hand grip for a few weeks lowered their resting blood pressure. After several years of tinkering, Wiley refined the hand grip to minimize the blood pressure spike caused by isometric muscle contractions. The first version was a boxy machine called the CardioGrip.

Today's sleeker one is being sold as the Zona Plus. The Zona Plus looks like an electric razor. You hold it in your right hand and squeeze as hard as you can for five seconds.

The device measures the strength of your squeeze and calculates a target 30% as strong. You do the same thing with your left hand. The device then prompts you through four 2-minute bouts of squeezing, with a minute break between each one. You squeeze just hard enough to keep the “Hold” sign in the display atop the hand grip (see photo). A beep and a visual signal tell you if you are squeezing too hard or not hard enough. The whole session, which should be done at least three times a week, lasts about 12 minutes. You can do it while watching the news, reading a book, or any other time you are sitting still for a few minutes.

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Modest reductions

A handful of studies have looked at how the CardioGrip and Zona Plus influence blood pressure. All of the studies have been small (under a dozen participants in each) and short (2–3 months). The results, though, have been remarkably similar. In the eight published studies we reviewed, participants' systolic blood pressure (the top number of a blood pressure reading) dropped an average of 14 points. The device had little effect on diastolic pressure. As is the case for almost everything in medicine, different people respond differently to the hand grip exercise. Individual responses to using the device for a month or so vary from a 55 mm Hg drop in systolic pressure to the rare but small increase. If these results hold up in longer, larger studies, they suggest that this simple exercise could lower blood pressure as much as a first-line anti-hypertension drug.

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Exercise addition, not replacement

The Zona Plus doesn't offer an immediate fix for high blood pressure. You have to use it for four to six weeks to see any results. It isn't a cure for high blood pressure, since if you stop doing the exercise your blood pressure will begin to creep back up. And it isn’t a substitute for regular aerobic exercise. While it may lower your blood pressure, you still need brisk walking, swimming, bicycling, or other activities to strengthen your heart, blood vessels, lungs, and bones, and to keep your blood sugar under control. Most people can use the Zona Plus; the company that makes the device says it isn't for people with arthritis in the hands, carpal tunnel syndrome, nerve damage from diabetes, an aneurysm, or mitral valve problems. Although the Zona Plus is FDA approved, it isn't yet covered by Medicare or most large health insurers.

The purchase represents an out-of-pocket expense, but that may be money well spent if it keeps your blood pressure under control or lets you eliminate a blood pressure drug from your daily handful of pills. As an added incentive, the Zona Plus comes with a money-back guarantee if you don't see an improvement in your blood pressure after using it as directed for eight weeks.

For more information:
call 866-669-9662 (toll free)
or visit www.zona.com.
FACT #1. **Even with today’s drugs, 70% of people cannot control high blood pressure.**

The Center for Disease Control says that many patients are not able to control high blood pressure because:

- Conventional drugs do not work for them
- Some can’t live with the side effects of drugs
- Many don’t have the money to spend on an ongoing basis

For most people, Zona Plus Therapy is an effective solution to these problems.

“**I expect Zona Plus Therapy to be the new standard of initial care for hypertensive patients.”**

—Carlos Morillo, M.D. Ph.D. Professor of Medicine, Cardiology

FACT #2. **With Zona Plus Therapy, many physicians can recommend lowering or eliminating patient medication.**

Zona Plus Therapy can reduce or eliminate the need for hypertension medication. Studies show:

- An average drop of 19mmHg systolic for medicated patients
- More than 55% of patients can eliminate medications entirely

“**At the end of 6 weeks I was at the end of my medication, thank you Zona Plus.”**

—William Hidalgo

FACT #3. **In just 6 weeks, Zona Plus Therapy can help control high blood pressure!**

The benefits of Zona Plus Therapy:

- Lowers blood pressure an average drop of 27 mmHg systolic, 19 mmHg systolic for patients on medication
- Changes the blood’s chemistry
- Increases arterial flexibility
- Improves the balance of the autonomic nervous system

“I have had high blood pressure since I was a teenager and I am now 55. My blood pressure was hovering around 150/100, after six weeks of using Zona Plus my blood pressure came down into the 120s/80s range. Needless to say I am VERY appreciative!”—Laura Sutherland, RN

FACT #4. **Zona Plus Therapy is guaranteed or your money back.**

The Zona Plus is guaranteed. Try it for 8 weeks without risk.

Find out more at [www.zona.com](http://www.zona.com) or call us toll free at 1-866-669-9662

*Never eliminate medications without your physician’s approval*