

Hibiscus Tea for Hypertension



Hibiscus sabdariffa

Hypertension is one of the most prevalent and important health problems facing society today. Blood pressure is the force that a person's blood exerts against the walls of their blood vessels. This pressure depends on the resistance of the blood vessels and how hard the heart must work. In 90% of cases the etiology (cause) of hypertension is unknown. This is called 'essential hypertension'. High blood pressure typically does not cause symptoms. Long-term high blood pressure, however, is a major risk factor for coronary artery disease, stroke, heart failure, atrial fibrillation, peripheral arterial disease, vision loss, chronic kidney disease, and even dementia.

If left untreated hypertension is a progressive and potentially fatal disease. Non-pharmacological treatments such as diet, exercise, relaxation (meditation) and yoga are effective for controlling mild hypertension. In this article hibiscus tea will be discussed as an aid in controlling hypertension without side effects.

In conventional medicine high blood pressure is treated with diuretics, adrenergic receptor blockers, calcium channel blockers and angiotensin converting enzyme inhibitors. Of course, these pharmaceutical agents carry side effects as they dysregulate numerous enzyme systems. Side effects include vertigo, fatigue, depression, congestive heart failure, hallucinations, tachycardia, angina, hypokalemia, gastrointestinal disturbances and leukopenia. Generally, side effects occur more in older patients than in younger patients.



Dried Hibiscus Flowers

Many mechanisms have been proposed to account for the rise in peripheral resistance in hypertension. Evidence implicates disturbances in the kidneys' electrolyte and water management as a potential cause. In other words, dehydration and deficiencies in magnesium and potassium can potentiate hypertension.

Bioregulatory approaches for the treatment of mild to moderate hypertension involve sufficient hydration, supplements with electrolytes (magnesium and potassium), decreased sugar/processed carbohydrates and excess salt, and regular exercise and meditation. Most people benefit from exercise at least 5 days of the week. Examples of suitable activities are walking, cycling, swimming, yoga and Pilates. Smoking can also raise blood pressure. Avoiding or quitting smoking reduces the risk of hypertension, serious heart conditions, and other health issues.

There are numerous herbs and herbal formulations that also assist with regulation of circulation and balance of blood pressure. One herb proven to reduce hypertension is *Hibiscus sabdariffa* L. Hibiscus has a long history of medicinal use. The vibrant flower is used in cultures all over the world to treat a variety of ailments and illnesses. The most common species of hibiscus used in medicine is *Hibiscus sabdariffa*, also known as Roselle.

Hibiscus is widely grown in Central and West Africa, South East Asia, and elsewhere throughout the globe. Drinking a tea made from the plant is the most common way to use hibiscus medicinally. The thick, red and fleshy, cup-shaped calyces of the flower are consumed worldwide as a cold beverage and as a hot drink. The tea is made from drying many different parts of the plant, but mostly the flower itself. Once the dried parts are steeped, the tea turns a rich ruby red color. The drink itself is quite sour, with a taste like cranberries.

Hibiscus tea has been used traditionally for many conditions, particularly high blood pressure, liver disorders, high cholesterol and infections.^{1, 2, 3, 4, 5} Research demonstrates that the hot (or cold) Hibiscus beverage is full of vitamin C and antioxidants, so it is a great way to prevent colds during the winter months.^{6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11}

A 2010 study published in the Journal of Nutrition found that consuming hibiscus tea lowered blood pressure in people at risk of high blood pressure and those with mildly high blood pressure.¹² Study participants consumed three 8-ounce servings of hibiscus tea or a placebo beverage daily for 6 weeks. Those who drank the hibiscus tea saw a significant reduction in their systolic blood pressure, compared to those who consumed the placebo drink. The researchers concluded, “These results suggest daily consumption of hibiscus tea, in an amount readily incorporated into the diet, lowers BP in pre- and mildly hypertensive adults and may prove an effective component of the dietary changes recommended for people with these conditions.”

Numerous other studies have also demonstrated the anti-hypertensive effects of *Hibiscus sabdariffa* L. in both humans and experimental animals. Recent pharmacological studies have shown that *Hibiscus sabdariffa* extracts significantly reduced blood pressure in humans^{13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18} and in experimental animals^{19, 20, 21, 22}. However, the exact mechanisms responsible for these effects of *Hibiscus sabdariffa* are not fully understood.

Safety and Toxicology

From animal studies it has been shown that *Hibiscus sabdariffa* is a very safe plant to consume. Its extracts are characterized by a very low degree of toxicity.^{23, 24, 25}

Making Hibiscus Tea

Desired Ingredients:

- 2 cups fresh organic Hibiscus Flowers (or 1/2 cup dried organic Hibiscus Flowers)
- 8 cups spring water
- (optional) 1/8 cup raw honey (add more if you like your tea sweeter)
- (optional) 3 tablespoons fresh lime juice

Bring the hibiscus flowers and water to a boil in a large pot. Once the water starts boiling, switch off the flame and cover the vessel. At this point, you can also add other herbs if desired, such as lemon grass or lemon balm. Let the tea steep for 15-20 minutes. Mix in the honey and lime juice till completely combined. Strain the tea. Serve hot or cold.

Dosage

Generally, it is not necessary to exceed a quart a day of hibiscus tea for adults and a half-quart for a 75-pound child.

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