Live for Health

By Richard A. Hansen, M.D.

For the best of health our food needs to be attractive, delicious, and carefully chosen to be most beneficial for health and longevity. That is the reason for the cookbook we prepared, *Vegan Homestyle*. The word *vegan* comes from a Latin word *vegetus*, meaning lively or vigorous. A vegetarian dietary is derived from the same Latin concept, but includes other styles of food preparation. It is our educated conviction that eating only fruit, vegetables, grains, nuts, and legumes, which we basically call a total plant-based diet, is healthier than an *omnivorous* diet. Additional health benefits are gained, and by not consuming artificial substances such as bovine growth factors or other hormones found in dairy products, antibiotics or pesticide residues which are often given to farm animals, or are found on food as contaminants. We try to avoid fermented foods, too, such as vinegar, and unnatural stimulants such as caffeine found in coffee and many types of sodas. We will look at some of the medical issues to explain briefly how this plant-based dietary can provide the best of health and protection for you.

**Heart Disease**

Coronary heart disease is our leading killer today, taking lives and affecting the livelihood of millions around the world. It is caused by our fashionable western lifestyle, where exercise has been replaced by labor saving devices, and where dietary practices involve eating too much, eating too often, and with emphasis on fats, sugar, and refined foods rather than garden produce and natural grains, nuts, cereals, and other plant products. Cholesterol builds up in the arteries, plugging not only the coronary arteries serving the heart but also brain circulation. This damaging wax like substance is found only in animal products. Of course, our liver makes some of our body’s cholesterol, all we need to insulate nerves in the brain and elsewhere. But all dietary cholesterol is just that much excess, adding to the risk of progressive atherosclerosis–hardening of the arteries–accelerating the aging process, and running ever higher risk of an early heart attack or stroke. All this can be avoided if we eat right, exercise often, avoid tobacco, control stress, and keep the weight where your body looks fit rather than fat.

**Cancer**

In regard to cancer, there are many kinds, named according to the organs affected. The kind of malignant cells involved and other contributing factors help to complete our diagnosis and terminology. Lung cancer, our leading malignancy, is a killer primarily caused by tobacco smoking, though other pollutants such as asbestos can also contribute to this disease. Colon malignancies, second to cancer in death statistics, and are more directly related to dietary factors. Insufficient dietary fiber, leads to chronic constipation, a major contributing risk factor, along with alcohol, high-fat intake, and a preponderance of meat and animal products. When the meat is charcoal broiled or partially burned, the risk of cancer increases due to carcinogenic cancer-causing chemicals, which are produced by high temperatures and catalytic combustion. Breast cancer is not only common in women, but also found in men. Its risk is related to obesity, high fat intake, alcohol, as well as possible exposure to cancer causing viruses. Even the survival of cancer victims is affected by diet, with a much longer survival on the plant-food based vegan diet compared to other dietaries. When soy is added to the diet, many kinds of cancerous growths are inhibited, and cruciferous vegetables such as broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, and cauliflower also contain chemical compounds which protect against cancer and extend life. These are called phytochemicals, and each protective food provides some benefit to help inhibit tumor formation or to break down carcinogens. There are cancers involving blood cells and lymphatic tissues which have been directly linked to animal products. These malignant diseases are called leukemia and lymphoma. There are too many other types to discuss here, but suffice it to say most of these cancers are caused by viruses, and animal such as cows and chickens are infamous for being carriers of these cancer inducing chemicals. Bovine leukemia virus, for example, is present in up to 70% of dairy cows, and it passes into the milk as well as other dairy products, commonly used in prepared foods. Fowl leukosis, a similar disease, is epidemic in the poultry industry. The best protection is obviously avoidance, and this means that a vegan diet can be your "immunization" to protect against cancer better than any other lifestyle.

**Diabetes**

Sugar diabetes is on the increase in our society. Its common symptoms are caused by persistent elevation of blood glucose, or sugar. Glucose testing is easy, and the screening tests for diabetes are readily available. Sadly, more than half the people with diabetes do not know they have the condition. Although children can develop diabetes, this juvenile onset kind, called type I, is more of an autoimmune disorder. The question is, what causes the pancreas to misbehave? What makes the beta cells in the pancreatic islets quit producing insulin? An answer has been found. For many children with a family history of diabetes, the pancreas is sensitive to immunological reactions. And, the early use of dairy milk causes an antibody crossover reaction to occur, damaging the delicate cells that produce insulin. Hence, the sudden shock of finding your child has diabetes, and who may need insulin for the rest of their lives. Soy containing foods, such as soy milk or tofu, on the other hand help to decrease this antibody response, thus protecting a person from Type I diabetes.

Adult-onset diabetes, called type II, is much more common. More than 90% of diabetic patients have this kind. It occurs when a person’s body size exceeds the ability of the pancreas to supply adequate insulin. Obesity, defined as a high body mass index, more than doubles the risk of getting diabetes. Fortunately, this type of diabetes is reversible, if the lifestyle is altered, the weight normalized, and a combination of proper diet and exercise is adopted before the worn-out organs lose the ability to recover. Insulin resistance also contributes to the persistent elevation of blood sugar. This similarly responds to a cutback in dietary fat, avoidance of meat and dairy products, and daily exercise carried out with vigor and enthusiasm. We have seen many people reverse this disease, even recovering from complications such as neuropathy when such measures are maintained. What a savings this is on medication cost! Even better is the renewed wellbeing and energy that comes from eating natural foods, the Live-for-Health vegan way.

**Obesity**

More than one third of Americans are obese, and over 50% are overweight. You can see this at the shopping mall, the grocery store, many churches, and even the corridors of our schools–grade school through college. We are getting too big, eating too much, and exercising too little. In order to control weight, every meal’s calories must be burned up or converted into energy with physical exercise. With today’s increase in refined food processing there is an increase in refined low-fiber foods; white flour breads and pastries; and increased sugar consumption, abundant in chocolate, sodas and ice cream. Childhood is the time when life habits are formed, and our children's health habits will emulate not only their parents but their peers. So, the issues in this conflict are clear. We must eat the healthiest food we can find, and the proper amounts. Then, with a commitment to fitness, find some kind of daily exercise and keep doing it. To be of maximum benefit some of this exercise should be aerobic, or heart toning, to elevate the pulse rate and make us puff and pant a little. This will make your skin glisten with a healthy sweat, and tone appear muscles including the heart. Other types of exercise will help to strengthen her muscles. They may involve weight training, isometrics, or pleasurable activities such as gardening, chopping wood, construction projects, or athletic sports such as tennis, golf, mountain climbing, and many more. Sedentary living is a major cause of this health hazard, and must be overcome by dietary education, willpower, and choices for more healthful habits. The dividends are compounded daily, but paid out in a longer more abundant life.

You can read more on this subject and learn to eat the healthiest foods available by purchasing our cookbook, *Vegan Homestyle*, available with a phone call to our medical clinic. I wish you the best of health, physically, mentally, and spiritually. May we all live for the blessing of our Creator, who made us this way.

*[Doctor Hansen, is author of the popular book on home health care,* ***Get Well At Home****, and co-author of the wonderful cookbook by Kay Hansen,* ***Vegan Homestyle****. He currently serves as medical director of the* ***Emerald Valley Wellness Clinic****, in Creswell, Oregon. The above article is adapted from the Forward to our cookbook. For further information or inquiries, contact:* ***clinic1@emeraldwellness.com****]*