

# The Ancient Japanese (Macrobiotic) approach to cardiovascular diseases

## 1. Arteriosclerosis (hardening of the arteries)

This condition occurs when the insides of the arteries become clogged and lose their normal elasticity. It is caused by the accumulation of arterial plaque. This plaque has various sources:

1 ) Fat based plaque: caused by consumption of refined processed oils, indigestible dairy products, cooked fatty meat products (sausages, chops etc.)

2) Sugar based plaque: caused by consumption of various forms of sugar and refined carbohydrates.

3) Mineral based plaque: caused by an overacid condition in the body which draws calcium and other minerals from the bones and deposits them in the arteries. (And many other places as well)

In severe cases, the passageway in the arteries becomes progressively narrow and eventually closes. The resulting blockage of blood flow usually causes a heart attack and often death. This condition used to be rare in persons under the age of 50, but now it is even found among school-age children. To determine whether you have this condition, put the fingers of both hands together and try to push them back to an angle of 90 degrees. If they cannot go this far your arteries are hard and inflexible. The dietary approach for the relief of this condition is discussed below.

## 2. Stroke (Cerebral Hemorrhage or Thrombosis)

A cerebral hemorrhage is caused by the weakening of the blood vessels. When a person with this condition is in a relaxed state there is usually no problem. However, any sudden increase in circulation may cause a weak blood vessel to burst. When this happens in one of the blood vessels in the brain it is called a "cerebral hemorrhage" or "stroke." The second type of stroke is called "cerebral thrombosis" and results from a clot or blockage in one of the blood vessels in the brain. This condition is generally caused by the same types of foods that produce arteriosclerosis, and often occurs when deposited fat or cholesterol breaks loose from the wall of an artery and lodges in one of the cranial blood vessels. To relieve these conditions, foods which weaken the blood vessels or which create fat or cholesterol deposits should be avoided. These include saturated fats like those contained in meat, eggs and dairy products, as well as sugar and other strong yin foods. Mineral-rich foods like seaweeds and hard leafy vegetables will restore the blood vessels to their normal strength and flexibility while the old traditional Japanese way of eating will help to gradually melt the deposits of fat and cholesterol away. One of the best Japanese foods for this process is "natto." A person with these disorders must limit his intake of refined oil and should use cold processed vegetable oils such as sesame, olive or coconut oil. This general approach can also be applied for arteriosclerosis.

## 3. Abnormal Blood Pressure (Hypertension and Hypotension)

The balance of yin and yang in the body is very important. Excess yin has a dilating effect and excess yang has a contracting effect. The heart is a pump, so it needs to be able to expand and contract evenly for the heart to work smoothly. If there is an excess yin condition within the body (often coupled with acidic body liquids) the heart will be able to expand, but find it difficult to contract, thus putting stress on its ability to function.

An excessive intake of cold liquid, spirits, coffee and other types of yin often causes the heart to become swollen and over expanded. In this condition, the organ must work harder in order to maintain the normal circulation of blood and often hypertension, or high blood pressure results. If a person with this condition continues to take excess yin, the heart may become so swollen and loose that it no longer has sufficient contracting power to hardly function at all. As a result, blood pressure often becomes dangerously low, producing what is called hypotension. Hypertension is less serious than hypotension, and can be cured in about one month through proper eating and other health adjustments, whereas hypotension is a more advanced symptom and therefore takes a longer time to cure. Since both conditions are the result of overexpansion. In the ancient Japanese way of eating, we should emphasize more yang factors in our cooking and selection of food.

#### **4. Dilation of an Arterial Wall (Aneurysm)**

This condition arises when the wall of an artery expands and creates a small sac which fills with blood. This occurs when an artery has become weak from the intake of yin, and happens most often in the aorta, since the blood pressure there is very high and yin factors are readily attracted to this region. This condition can be helped with the traditional Japanese way of eating, with a little more salt and oil than usual in cooking. These factors have the effect of making the arteries more elastic.

#### **5. Broken Capillaries**

When the blood vessels become swollen and enlarged from the over consumption of yin, they start to break down. The functions between branches are particularly susceptible. Nose bleeding is a good example of this. It occurs when the blood becomes too thin and when its volume becomes excessive. The direct cause is often the over intake of fruit juice, soda, water and other cold liquids. Nose bleeding can be quickly relieved by making the blood thicker and the capillaries more contracted. To do this, moisten a piece of tissue or paper napkin with saliva and dip it in salt or dentie. Insert this in your nostril for several minutes. Also, to quickly thicken the blood, eat a small amount of gomasio or a piece of umeboshi plum every 10 minutes for about one-half hour.

#### **6. Artherosclerosis**

This is a type of arteriosclerosis in which deposits of fat develop within and around the heart. These deposits start in the more peripheral regions of the circulatory system and gradually move inward. The cause of this condition is the same as that for arteriosclerosis in other words, foods which contribute to the development of fat and cholesterol. We should therefore approach it in the same way as arteriosclerosis. Twenty-five years ago, heart disease affected about one out of eight people. This rate has increased tremendously, so that now, at least two out of every five people will eventually develop it. One out of every three men and one out of every six women in the Unites States can be expected to die of heart disease or stroke before the age of 60. It is now known that saturated fats and cholesterol from inappropriate food are largely responsible for these disorders, and many medical associations have advised the avoidance of fat as well as an overall reduction of cholesterol-rich foods like meat and eggs. However, these recommendations usually overlook the other types of foods which contribute to these problems, such as sugar, fruits, and dairy foods.