Heart Disease and Environment

Heart disease and stroke kill 40% of Americans, all of which may result from malnutrition. We are overfed and undernourished. Obesity, even among children, is becoming a major health problem. At least 60% of children and young adults have early atherosclerotic damage.¹

Heart disease, cancer, and other degenerative disorders are most frequent among populations of the industrialized nations. These diseases have been increasing rapidly over the past few generations, making it easy for the petro-chemical-medical-pharmaceutical-complex to assign blame to bad genes, while ignoring the issues of increased environmental degradation and deteriorating nutrition over the same time frame.

Compared to other countries we indeed have an abundance and great variety of cheap food. Near perfect appearance belies the fact that our food is lacking in nutrients, having been grown in mineral-deficient soils, treated with toxic pesticides, fertilizers, and preservatives, harvested while unripe, and shipped long distances.

In spite of enormous technological advances and billions of dollars spent in medical research we are told the causes of most heart disease and cancer are unknown, and more misleading, that they are genetic or inherited. The vast amount of money spent on research is designed to return maximum profit to the industry financing the studies. Looking for causes and inexpensive solutions is not cost-effective. It is more profitable to sell expensive pharmaceuticals and high-tech procedures, than to recommend patients take nutritional supplements, eat fresh fruits and vegetables (preferably organic), avoid processed shelf oils, junk foods, fast foods, sugared and caffeinated beverages.

Dr. Joel Wallach, the famous veterinarian/naturopathic physician from Missouri whose tape, Dead Doctors Don’t Lie, shares some very interesting bits of information. He reminds us that all food grown in this country is raised on mineral-depleted soils, including all animal feed. Farmers are advised to use nutritional supplements to keep their livestock healthy and disease-free, while human babies are fed mineral deficient formulas and no one advises us otherwise.

Dr. Wallach mentions that the agricultural industry decided in the early 1950s to raise turkeys on a large scale and used fat-rich corn oil to speed up the fattening process. Hundreds of turkeys died of heart attack as a result. But the marketing machinery had been set in motion to produce margarine from corn oil, and since it hadn’t been proven to cause heart attack in humans they went ahead as planned. Heart disease in turkeys was corrected by a simple diet change, while in humans the etiology is either unknown or genetic.

Heart disease has spawned another whole industry of specialists, invasive procedures, and prescription drugs. What does that mean to the average American? It has made us poorer in health and poorer in pocketbook. One of Dr. Wallach’s great observations relates to heart transplants, which he and other holistic practitioners believe are avoidable with diet change, nutritional supplementation and exercise. The procedure costs a small fortune while the heart is free from a donor, even the blood comes from donors, and the suture costs a few pennies.

Homocysteine vs. Cholesterol

Cholesterol may not be the villain in heart disease after all. Eighty percent of heart attacks occur in men with normal cholesterol levels, while low levels of cholesterol lead to other health problems. Homocysteine, like cholesterol, is produced in the body where it serves a function and is normally broken down. Problems arise when it remains intact, enters the bloodstream attacking blood vessel walls, contributing to heart disease and stroke. Several nutrients prevent homocysteine build-up. Folic acid (a B-vitamin), vitamins B6 and B12, choline (a B-vitamin like substance), and betaine assist the body in breaking down homocysteine.²

Homocysteine is an amino acid that promotes free-radical oxidation and premature vascular disease. It forms in the blood from a diet heavy in methionine rich foods such as red meat, poultry, wild game, and ricotta cheese, while at the same time lacking in vitamin B-complex foods, necessary for effective breakdown of the methionine.³

High levels of homocysteine are a warning of early arteriosclerosis (hardening of the arteries), which can lead to angina, arrhythmia, or heart attack. Many prescription drugs, vitamin deficiency, and excessive environmental chemical overload all contribute to increased levels of homocysteine.⁴

Harvard scientist, Dr. Kilmer McCully, first proposed homocysteine’s role in cardiovascular disease in 1969. The cholesterol theory adherents dismissed his ideas, and it is only in recent years that a new generation of scientists recognize the validity of his research.⁵

Folic Acid

Folic acid was one of the last vitamins to be discovered. It performs several functions: contributes to growth of new cells and replacement of old cells; helps synthesize genetic molecules DNA and RNA; and assists in transport of carbon building bricks to “construction sites” in the body. Folic acid deficiency can lead to anemia by impeding replacement of red blood cells.⁶

The body requires additional folic acid during pregnancy and lactation, during illness, and with use of some drugs (including oral contraceptives), several cancer treatments, alcohol and tobacco. Inadequate folic acid during early pregnancy has been linked to neural tube birth defects (spina bifida or anencephaly) as well as cleft lip, cleft palate, cardiovascular disorders and impaired neurological disorders in newborns.⁷
Folic acid is derived from the same root word as foliage, hence the dark green leafy connection. Foods rich in folic acid are brewer's yeast, spinach, broccoli, romaine lettuce, and orange juice. Taking a B-complex vitamin supplement is a simple solution for avoiding homocystine build-up and potential health problems.8

The Lactose Connection

Intrigued by the 1960s debate regarding dietary fat or sugar being the greater risk factor in coronary heart disease, Dr. William Grant speculated that fat might pose a higher risk for men, while sugar may be a greater risk for women. Curious about Dr. McCully's theories on homocystine, Dr. Grant began to investigate the risk factors associated with milk consumption, which led to his theory on lactose and ischemic heart disease (i.e. caused by atherosclerosis).9

After studying the dietary habits, disease, and mortality statistics of more than 32 countries, Grant believes the past 30-year emphasis of cardiovascular disease caused by animal fats may have been misleading. Early, but overlooked research indicated animal protein had a higher statistical correlation with coronary heart disease than did animal fat.10

Researchers in the United Kingdom support Grant's findings that consumption of large quantities of lactose may be an additional risk factor for atherosclerosis. It is believed the lactose easily converts to triglycerides, which are then incorporated into very low-density lipoprotein cholesterol VLDL-C in the liver. The triglycerides are considered primary risk factors for ischemic heart disease. The methionine in milk is suspected of contributing to plaque through its metabolic product – homocystine. This leads Dr. Grant to believe dietary sugar is implicated in cardiovascular disease because sugar is stored as triglycerides, which either goes directly to the arteries, or is incorporated into VLDL-C in the liver, contributing to atherosclerosis.11

Studies show lactose has a high correlation with ischemic heart disease for men of all ages, while Grant showed lactose affects only post-menopausal women, thereby suggesting that estrogen and other physiological adaptations of child bearing and lactation may be protective of younger women.12

Radiation Mutation

John Gofman, MD, PhD, Professor Emeritus, University of California at Berkeley, and Director of the Committee for Nuclear Responsibility, hypothesizes that medical radiation, even at the lowest doses, is an important

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(if not overlooked) cause of death from ischemic heart disease. The probable mechanism is radiation-induced mutations in coronary arteries, resulting in dysfunctional clones (mini-tumors) of smooth muscle cells.13

According to Dr. Gofman, mutations acquired by smooth muscle cells cause them to proliferate, whereby they gradually replace normal smooth muscle cells at a localized patch of artery (a mini-tumor). This patch of cells, unable to correctly process lipoproteins, becomes inflamed causing atherosclerotic

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plaque to form. The value of medical X-ray is not disregarded, but Dr. Gofman makes a strong argument for reducing the dose and number of procedures, which he believes are administered too casually and too frequently by the medical profession. He admits, “doses from diagnostic X-ray examinations are generally relatively low,” but warns, “the magnitude of the practice makes for significant radiological impact.” This would be another example of how environmental exposures affect our health. Are we all doomed? Perhaps not.

Vitamin C to the Rescue

Dr. Matthias Rath, who worked closely with Linus Pauling on the benefits of vitamin C, is a leader in the scientific and medical breakthrough toward eradicating heart disease. After years of study and helping patients to full recovery, he concludes that all genetic disorders and all known risk factors to heart disease are associated with vitamin deficiency.

The heart pumps 100,000 times every day making it the hardest working of all body organs. The human blood vessel network averages 60,000 miles. Instability and lesions in the vessel walls are a major cause of cardiovascular disease. Dr. Rath believes vitamin C protects and stabilizes blood vessel walls. The standard American diet (SAD) is woefully lacking in vital nutrients found primarily in fresh fruits and vegetables which have been grown in mineral rich soils. Cooking and processing easily destroy vitamin C.

Vitamin C is an important anti-oxidant and serves as a co-factor for many biochemical reactions. Its most important function is to stimulate production of collagen, elastin, and other reinforcement molecules to form connective tissue. The more collagen produced, the greater stability of bones, skin, and the 60,000 mile-long walls of arteries, veins, and capillaries. Dr. Rath believes “cardiovascular disease is nothing else than an early form of scurry.”

Another health problem plaguing Americans is bleeding and infected gums, which is suspected of contributing to heart disease. Might it be possible that vitamin C deficiency is the underlying cause of both gum and heart disease simultaneously, and not necessarily that one condition causes the other?

The average American diet contains enough vitamin C to prevent recognizable scurry, but not enough to promote stable, reinforced blood vessel walls. A lifetime of cracks, lesions, and tears in weakened blood vessel walls without sufficient vitamin C to provide the necessary collagen, cannot heal properly. When this is repeated too often atherosclerotic deposits develop reducing blood flow, leading to heart attack and stroke. This is a heavy price to pay for a vitamin deficiency, especially when as little as 300 milligrams of vitamin C daily can prevent heart attack and stroke.

Dr. Rath believes there are two main reasons why the simple solution to heart disease has been overlooked – an economic one and the power of scientific dogma. Vitamins, considered natural substances, are not patentable. Without economic incentive pharmaceutical companies are not motivated to invest in research and clinical trials. The healing and restorative power of vitamins was swept under the rug. Cholesterol lowering drugs, on the other hand, are a multi-billion dollar market in the US. As for scientific dogmas – the medical and scientific communities perceive cardiovascular disease to be largely predetermined by family history, and to a lesser extent, lifestyle factors.

Dr. Rath has demonstrated that we are not helpless victims of inherited genetic flaws when it comes to heart disease. Instead, we are victims of poor nutrition and misinformation.

Dr. Rath is the founder of Health Now, a medical research and development firm specializing in the development of scientifically based nutritional products. He holds the world's first patents to reverse heart disease without surgery. More information is available by calling 1-800-624-2442.

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