

# **Breakthrough in heart disease treatment – Nutrition Before Surgery**

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A new law proposed by the California State Assembly would require that doctors fully inform their patients about the possibility of reversing heart disease through nutrition therapy, prior to delivering non-emergency treatment for this condition.

Patient would have to be informed about all the risks and side effects of the current heart disease therapies like bypass surgery and angioplasty and the possibility of side-effects free treatment through lifestyle change and sensible use of inexpensive medications. **They would also need to be told that the main cause of their condition is the Western lifestyle: a diet rich in animal products and processed foods along with lack of exercise.**

If passed, this law can be regarded as milestone in modern health care, as it shifts the emphasis from treatment to prevention, from treating the symptoms to treating the cause the roots of naturopathy.

The CNM was the first institution in the UK/Ireland to respond to this news by organising a seminar in July on *How to Reverse Heart Disease - Nutritional Strategies to Target the Nation's Biggest Killer*, where I had the pleasure of showing that there is an effective and cost saving alternative to non-emergency surgery, and how some medical thinking is waking up to the evidence that heart disease can be avoided, arrested, or even reversed with a change of diet.

## **Scary Statistics**

Cardiovascular disease is recognized as the number one killer in the Western world. It causes nearly half of all deaths in Europe (48%) and kills more people in Ireland/UK than any other cause. These scary statistics deserve very serious attention.

## **Lifestyle as the main cause**

While genetic factors play a part, 80% to 90% of coronary heart disease is caused by lifestyle factors.

While all males after 65 years of age exposed to a traditional Western lifestyle have cardiovascular disease, the condition is almost non-existent in populations such as those living in rural Asia, Africa, and Central and South America who follow a diet rich in fruits and vegetables, low in animal-derived and processed foods. As soon as they adopt a Western lifestyle, patterns of heart disease shift towards those of economically developed countries.

## **Lifestyle as the primary cure**

These differences in international statistics have prompted scientists like Dr. Dean Ornish, clinical professor of medicine at the University of California, San Francisco and Dr. Caldwell Esselstyn, ex President of the Cleveland Clinic (regarded as one of the top cardiovascular medical centers in the world) to rethink the treatment strategy of this disease and to tackle the disease by dealing with its very cause. In their groundbreaking studies, published in the world's most renowned scientific journals, they put patients with severe atherosclerosis and advanced coronary artery disease on a diet consumed by populations where the disease is almost non-existent, i.e. low fat plant based diet. Immediate benefits, such as relief of chest pains (angina) and tolerance for more exercise, were seen within days! Within weeks cholesterol levels and blood flow improved dramatically. Moreover, this diet was found to reverse the underlying disease (atherosclerosis) in 82% of patients in one year.

## **Lifestyle Change vs Surgery –Cost - Benefit Analysis**

The rationale behind the bill is both ethical and economic.

Bypass operation and angioplasty are among the most common major medical procedures performed in North America and Europe. The average total healthcare cost after six years is £132 000 for bypass surgery and £114 000 for angioplasty per patient. Despite the huge cost, the benefits of increased survival, heart attack prevention, or quality of life are **not impressive**. Recent studies have shown that angioplasty did not reduce the occurrence of death, another heart attack, or heart failure, and there was a trend toward recurrence of heart attacks during 4 years of follow-up. Similarly, recent analysis of 28 studies comparing heart surgery with medical therapy found less than a 2% absolute improvement in survival achieved from heart surgery over no operation. The reason for these average effects is that these procedures target large, stable plaques, but not the small volatile plaques inside arteries, that after rupturing are the main cause of heart attacks. Additionally, they are linked to numerous risks and complications, including cognitive decline, stroke, heart attack and bleeding.

By comparison diet-therapy has no side effects, and was shown to deal with the very cause of the disease by reversing all types of plaques, even in patients given less than 1 year to live whom bypass or angioplasty failed. As shown by Dr.Esselstyn, twenty years after starting the nutritional programme, these patients remain free of symptoms.

Dietary change can be taught for a few hundred pounds. This is why American health insurance companies were the first in the world to provide the Dr. Dean Ornish Program for Reversing Heart Disease as a covered benefit for their members in West Virginia and Pennsylvania. The cost of those intensive medically supervised live-in programs ranges between \$2000 and \$4000.

## **Changing the Treatment Paradigm for Coronary Artery Disease**

The new Californian bill is a long-overdue move in heart health care. Already in 1991, America's best cardiologists met at the National Conference on the Elimination of Coronary Artery Disease in Arizona to conclude that heart disease can be arrested, reversed, and even prevented with the help of diet-therapy and that **present nutritional guidelines of government and national health organizations do not provide a maximal opportunity either to arrest tackle heart disease epidemic**. Since then study after study has confirmed, that the only sure way to reach a cure from heart disease is by dealing with the cause of it - diet and lifestyle.

It's high time Irish/UK patients knew about it as well.

### **Nutritional Recommendations to Avoid and Reverse Coronary Artery Disease:**

The diet that heals heart disease is extremely simple. The National Conference on the Elimination of Coronary Artery Disease summarized its recommendations in one sentence:

*The optimal diet consists primarily of grains, legumes, vegetables, and fruit, with <10%-15% of its calories coming from fat.*

This is also the diet that is followed by the people who do not suffer from heart disease. What it means in practice:

**make it plant-based with 7-9 servings of fruit and vegetables, 6-11 servings whole grains and 2-3 servings of beans and lentils daily**

- avoid red and processed meats along with dairy like cheese or butter;
- eat fish and chicken not more than 2-3 times a week
- do not overdo the plant oils
- skip the processed foods like crisps, soft drinks, etc.

**People who reversed advanced coronary artery disease in the above mentioned studies did not consume any animal products or oils. Consult your doctor and nutritional therapist before you change your diet.**

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