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## Rituals for Longevity: HABITS THAT WILL HELP YOU FLY ABOVE THE FRAY

By James H. O'Keefe, M.D.

I am coming to see an individual's life as a trajectory. Over time what you think, choose and do is what you become. It is possible to see where you are headed years and even decades before you arrive there by looking closely at what you are doing today. In particular, the path your health follows is determined much less by your genes than your daily habits. Mundane as it seems, your day-to-day routine largely determines how healthy and happy you will be, how quickly you will age, what diseases you will or won't get, and how long you will live.

Many people spend their lives as though they have another one in the bank. But being alive is like being on board an aircraft flying through a storm: once you are aloft you have no option but to make the best of it. A serious oversight or mistake

can leave you spiraling out of control and going down in flames without a second chance. Settling into the right routines will keep you flying smoothly for decades to come.

Most of what you do in your day-to-day life is done in the context of a routine. Your health, vigor, and longevity are dependent upon habits. A routine that involves healthy habits will maintain the integrity of your bio-system and effectively repel the ravages of time and entropy.

But if you develop self-defeating customs, they will drag you into the downward spiral of accelerated aging and disease. The key to making your life the best it can be is to develop the right routines, and break the bad ones. Habits start simply enough, almost unnoticeably. Sharing a cigarette with a friend at a party, grabbing a can of Coke and a bag of potato chips from the vend-



Continued on page 2

## POLICOSANOL: EFFECTIVE OVER-THE-COUNTER CHOLESTEROL-LOWERING AGENT

Policosanol is an interesting and unique natural substance that appears to be the most effective over-the counter supplement for lowering cholesterol. This compound is found in plant waxes that are prevalent throughout nature.

Policosanol is generally derived from the waxy coating on sugar cane, but is also found in beeswax, rice bran, broccoli, spinach, alfalfa and oats. Plants make these compounds to act as a water barrier.

Scientists have been investigating the cholesterol-lowering abilities of policosanol for more than 30 years. The most recent studies show impressive reduction of bad (LDL) cholesterol, by approximately 20 to 30 percent. The exact mechanism whereby policosanol improves lipids is not entirely clear, but it appears to block the formation of cholesterol in the liver.

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# Rituals for Longevity

Continued from page 1

ing machine, scarfing down a doughnut in the mid-morning because you skipped breakfast, coming home after a long day at work to a big meal and then spending the entire evening watching television. When we find a pattern that feels good, we tend to repeat it. Soon a groove develops in our lives, and the action is no longer a choice, but an automatic response; it becomes the path of least resistance. These rituals that may have started as innocent whims can eventually become like chains so strong that sometimes you cannot break them to save your life.

Yet good habits are as easy to develop as bad ones. Your natural predisposition to develop rituals can be harnessed in a positive sense to 'vaccinate' yourself against illness, disease and aging. If you are like most people, you brush your teeth in the morning and before going to bed. If you have been disciplined to also work flossing daily into your routine, you will almost certainly have healthy teeth and gums for a lifetime. You don't need to think about whether or not to do your daily oral hygiene, it happens automatically.

My colleague and mentor Dr. Bob Conn likes to say, "If you make it your priority to eat for health rather than taste, you will develop a healthy taste"; when that happens, good nutrition becomes second nature too. Billions of people from cultures around the globe can attest to the fact that green tea can be habit-forming. And it's not for nothing that they call it happy hour—a drink or two before dinner is a routine that can bring relaxation with good health as a serendipitous benefit (as long as you limit your 'happiness' to not more than two drinks per day). Daily exercise will happen automatically if you can find activities that feel more like play and less like work. Sure, sex counts as exercise too, but you will need to find other fun activities that get your heart rate up as well.



My good friend Tom Medlock has a graduate degree from Harvard University and now teaches and coaches at Pembroke Hill High School in Kansas City, Missouri. He wrote to his students in their school paper: *"In cross country (running) we practice a lot; we have rituals we repeat many times. They make us stronger, faster, better, more than we were yesterday. The quality of your life practices (routines) factor greatly into what quality of life you have. Do you practice compassion for others? Do you practice self-discipline? Is there a general pattern of giving things your best? Repeat, repeat, repeat, repeat, and you become. But surely repeats are not the purpose of cross country or life. On our team we have a saying: We don't train to train, we train to race. Likewise in life: we don't practice to practice, we practice to fly."*

## GOOD THINGS FIRST

Bringing balance back to your life is a real key to health and happiness. Living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century American culture seems to

promote an unbalanced life: too much work—not enough play; excessive calories—not enough natural fresh foods; too much stress—not enough fun; too much TV—too little exercise; too much rushing around—insufficient restful sleep; too much materialism—too little spirituality. As Dr. Phil would ask, "Is it workin' for ya?" I know it doesn't work for me. One of the best ways to avoid getting swept away in the tide of the modern lifestyle is to live by the mantra: 'Good Things First'.

Get in the habit of prioritizing the things that will make your life better in the long run; such as exercise, good food and healthy beverages, time to play, plenty of rest and relaxation, and a chance to make meaningful connections. For example, each day you should try to eat lean protein three times, and at least six servings of vegetables and

fruits; drink eight glasses (about one liter) of water, two to three cups of tea, two glasses of non-fat milk or soymilk and a drink of wine, beer or spirits (if you enjoy this, and can drink responsibly).

If you are still hungry, have a treat but make sure it has no trans fats (found in doughnuts, French fries, or processed snack foods) or high fructose corn syrup (as in pop or candy). When you make it a priority to eat and drink all the good things first, you will find that you aren't constantly hungry; which makes it easier to resist the junk food temptations that surround you each day. You will also be getting all the great disease-fighting, anti-aging nutrients you need while at the same time avoiding empty calories.

In truth, most folks who say they don't have time to exercise really could find the time if they had the energy and the will to overcome their inertia and get moving. The average American now watches *four hours* of television daily. When you sit down in front of the TV you need to think, 'good things first'; and then ask yourself, "Have I gotten my exercise today?" If the answer is no, get up and go. At first this may seem uncomfortable, but in no time you will feel your energy level improve dramatically, and after a few weeks of daily exercise, you will find yourself raring to go. A routine of 30 to 60 minutes of exercise daily will turbocharge your energy level like nothing else can.

*"Somewhere over the rainbow, skies are blue, and the dreams that you dare to dream really do come true. Somewhere over the rainbow bluebirds fly, birds fly over the rainbow. . . That's where you'll find me."*

E.Y. Harburg

Changing a long-standing habit can be a difficult task. Sometimes a health problem such as a diagnosis of diabetes or high blood pressure or a heart attack can be a wake-up call—the silver lining behind the cloud. A reminder of your vulnerability can spur you to make changes in your life that can dramatically improve the

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## Rituals Continued from page 2

trajectory of your future. Instead of wasting your precious time and energy on anxieties about the future or ruminating about sufferings of the past, focus on what you can do to make your life better right here, right now. There is only one instant in which you can be truly alive—the present moment. The future has not yet arrived, the past is already history. But you can always begin anew with the present moment. The surest way to take care of the future is to take care of the present moment. You can only do what you can do—make each moment count.

In my case, I have turned a potential addiction into a positive health habit. I have a family history riddled with chemical dependency. I believe I have been 'addicted' to exercise from the time I was a small child. I distinctly recall the day when, as a sophomore college student, it became clear to me that it was time for me to give up on organized varsity athletics. At the time I made a promise to myself that I would continue to exercise every day, because I knew deep down that this is my coping mechanism, a crutch that keeps me happy and well-adjusted.

### LUCK FAVORS THE PREPARED

Your life is the product of your choices, actions, thoughts, and words. When you integrate meaningful positive habits into your day to day routine you will flourish and thrive. If you can make these practices a priority in your life and incorporate them into your daily routine, your excess body fat will melt away and your overall health and well-being will improve. Specific rituals can revolutionize your life and put you on a trajectory toward longevity with energy, health and vigor. Believe in yourself, make a plan and begin.

*"I'll spread my wings and I'll learn how to fly. I'll do what it takes 'til I touch the sky. Out of the darkness and into the sun. I'll make a wish, take a chance, make a change and break away."* Kelly Clarkson ♥

## 13 Rituals to Change the Trajectory of Your Life:

1. Smile. Think positive. Be optimistic and enthusiastic. You will discover that if you love life, life will love you back.
2. Eat until you are only 80 percent full and then stop. This is a tradition of the people of Okinawa, the society with the best longevity in the world.
3. Know your numbers. Keep your blood pressure (under 130/85), cholesterol (under 180), weight (BMI 25 or less), and sugar (less than 100) levels in the optimal ranges. Find a doctor you can relate to and trust and see him or her once a year.
4. Try to sleep 6 to 8.5 hours nightly.
5. Practice good oral hygiene: brush twice and floss once daily.
6. Exercise 30 to 60 minutes most or ideally all days of the week.
7. Limit television viewing to not more than two hours daily. Choose shows that make you laugh, make you happy or enrich your life. Watch TV only after you have gotten your exercise for the day. Or kill two birds with one stone by lifting weights, working out on the treadmill, or doing yoga while viewing television. Even making a meal, or folding laundry while you are watching is better than just sitting on the couch.
8. Get out for at least 15 to 30 minutes of fresh air daily.
9. Try to spend at least a few minutes daily in quiet reflection, whether in the form of prayer, meditation, yoga, or relaxation breathing, etc.
10. It's not all about you. Connect with your community and your world. Feel the energy flow into your existence when you make a positive difference in the network of life around you. The universal law of life is that you will only get what you give. If you want a long, vigorous life full of health, love and happiness, it helps to have a generous, caring attitude.
11. Eat fresh natural foods. Avoid processed foods, especially anything with hydrogenated polyunsaturated fats (trans fats), or high fructose corn syrup. Include lean protein in your diet three times a day. Consider adding whey protein powder, one scoop in water or skim milk for your morning protein source.
12. Each day take three omega-3 (fish oil) capsules (okay to take them all at one meal) and a multivitamin.
13. Give up tobacco permanently. Nothing else has the power to improve your health and longevity like stopping smoking for good. Quit making excuses. It's only the nicotine addiction that is brainwashing your mind. Once you have beaten this deadly habit, you will look back and wonder why it took so long to break free of this ball and chain. Zyban (Wellbutrin) and other drugs will double your chances of getting off tobacco once you make up your mind you want to stop smoking or chewing. ♥

## Go Red for Women!

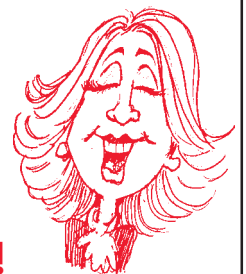
FEBRUARY 4, 2005

WEAR RED ON THIS DATE AND SHOW

YOUR SUPPORT FOR

THE HEART TRUTH CAMPAIGN TO INCREASE

AWARENESS ABOUT CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE IN WOMEN!



# Too Noisy to Hear Yourself Think?

By James H. O'Keefe, M.D.

This morning I awoke before dawn and went out for a three-mile run on the Kansas prairie. As the sun rose, the only sounds I could hear were the chirping of birds and the wind softly brushing over the tall prairie grass. Under a sky changing from black to blue, the clouds drifted overhead and I breathed the fresh clean air. These are the moments that rejuvenate my mind, invigorate my body, and make me 'just happy to be alive,' to use one of my mother's favorite expressions. Silent stillness can bring energy, inspiration and strength, just as excessive noise can drain your vital force and creativity.

Sometimes we need to seek out refuge from the clatter of modern life. Some people have become habituated to overstimulation to the point that they feel uncomfortable with silence. You probably know that too much noise can leave you stone deaf, or get you arrested for disturbing the peace, but you might be surprised to learn that chronic high-level noise exposure can also predispose you to a heart attack.

This was the conclusion of a recent study of over 4,000 German patients that evaluated the effects of ever-present irritating noise from industrial plants, construction work, automobile and truck traffic, etc., on the risk of heart attack. The results were based upon the estimated accumulated exposure to noxious noise over a 10-year period of time leading up to the heart attack. Interestingly, the study showed that women exposed to high levels of environmental noise were 50 percent more likely to suffer a heart attack than the women who did not have to endure a deafening clamor on a daily basis. Even men, generally consid-

ered the less sensitive gender, still showed a 30 percent increased risk of heart attack when having to live and/or work in a noisy environment.

Multiple studies have documented that chronic, high-level exposure to irritating sounds increases blood pressure and elevates stress hormones. We are learning that these disturbances in the autonomic nervous system play an important role in long-term risk of heart disease. We don't know for sure how much noise it takes to increase cardiovascular risk, and the threshold is likely to differ from one person to the next.

For example, my wife Joan, who grew up as a solitary child in a tranquil home, is especially sensitive to excessive noise and commotion. Her parents were 46 and 48 years old by the time their first and only child was born. Even her extended family is tiny—I kid her that she could have her family reunion in the bathroom of a room at the Holiday Inn. Yet today she lives in a household with four active and noisy children, three dogs who howl at anything that moves, and two cats. TVs blare and music rattles the windowpanes while the doorbells, phones, fax, and beeper ring incessantly. Joan sometimes complains, "I can't hear myself think in all this noise and commotion."

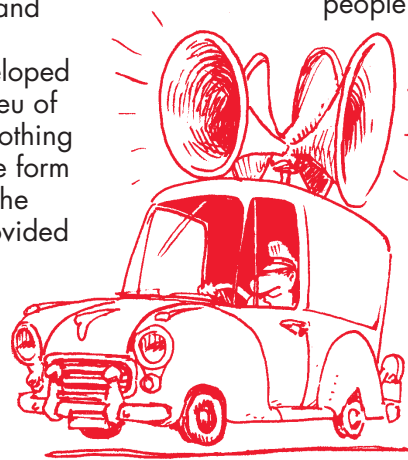
We humans developed as a species in a milieu of relative calm. The soothing voices of nature in the form of singing birds and the whispering winds provided most of the background sound in the environment of humans until the relatively recent blossoming of the highly mechanized

modern world. Dr. Gregg Jacobs believes, "The hyper-stimulation of the modern world threatens our health and well-being by depriving us of the calm and tranquility that is our evolutionary birthright."

Silence and solitude are essential elements of our life, and just like omega-3 fats or folic acid—if we do not get our minimum requirement of them on a regular basis it is difficult to stay physically and emotionally healthy. Author Jon Gordon in "The Energy Addict," writes about embracing the energy of silence: "Perhaps it can be said that it is the silence between the noise of the world that makes our life worth living. Sirens, cars, horns, construction, radios, television, and people all contribute to the constant noise that fills our ears and minds with a bombardment of stimuli. Within the silence sits the energy to recharge our batteries – to refuel our tired lives and help us create. All we have to do is tap it."

Silence and solitude provide the fertile soil that spawns ideas, insights and inspiration. The greatest discoveries in science and masterpieces of art were generally inspired by moments of silent reflection. A quiet and calm environment allows the mind to wander and enhances imagination and problem solving. Occasional solitude can improve our ability to cope with stress, and can also be a wellspring of self-discovery, spirituality and ingenuity. Numbed by noise and distracted by multi-tasking, many people have lost touch with their inner selves.

Americans have become addicted to a barrage of meaningless banter and insignificant images, all of which are largely irrelevant, forgettable and disposable. After years of living in a state of constant commotion, the prospect of solitude and silence can be



## Too Noisy to Hear Yourself Think?

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almost threatening. It is as though we become afraid of what we might discover if we relax long enough to experience our own existence as something other than a blur, so we quicken the pace and crank up the volume.

Even a few minutes of peace can be uplifting in certain settings. Sometimes an hour or two after putting the kids to bed, I steal upstairs to make sure they are comfortable and safe. To me, there is nothing more heart-warming and reassuring than the sight of Kathleen, Caroline, and Evan peacefully sleeping (maybe because this is virtually the only time they are quiet). They breathe deeply and softly as they dream with their entire lives ahead of them. As I gently tuck in their blankets and kiss each one on the cheek, everything seems right with the world, if only for those few moments. I might add that this doesn't seem to apply to teenagers. For instance, Jimmy, now a senior, is never in bed before we are. In fact, he frequently awakens us about midnight to negotiate for an extension of his usual 12 a.m. curfew, which doesn't typically elicit in us the same sense of calm reassurance. ♥

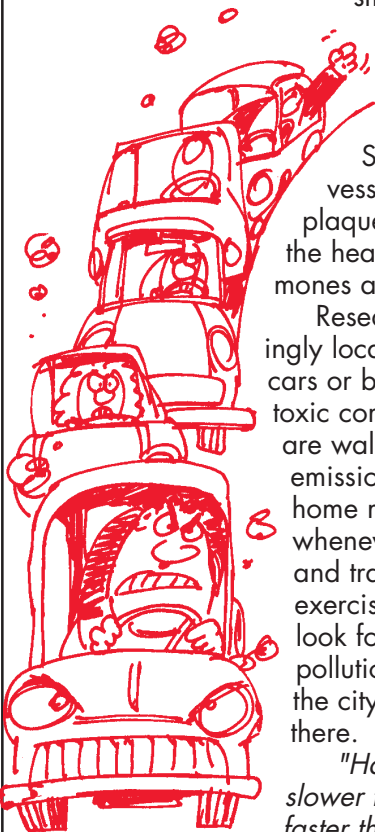
## STUDY LINKS AIR POLLUTION TO HEART ATTACK

A study published in October 2004 found that heart attack patients were three times more likely to have been driving or riding in traffic during the hour before the onset of crushing chest pain than doing any other activity. And it wasn't just the automobile drivers who experienced this phenomenon. Bus passengers and bicyclists were also noted to suffer heart attacks more often after riding in heavy traffic. The increased risk appeared to be more a function of smoggy conditions than noise or stress, according to the researchers. Many other scientific papers have documented the increased heart risk posed by air pollution, especially the particles belched out by diesel engines.

Smog causes inflammation in the blood vessels, which can sometimes lead to rupture of plaques resulting in a heart attack. It also disrupts the heart's natural rhythms, increases stress hormones and constricts blood vessels.

Research shows that air pollution can be a surprisingly localized risk. For example, people riding in cars or buses inhale 10 times more pollutants and toxic compounds than folks in the same vicinity who are walking on the sidewalk, where the tailpipe emissions are not pointed directly at them. The take-home message is to avoid smoggy conditions whenever possible. Try to use less congested routes and travel at non-peak times when you can. When exercising, stay away from busy streets, and instead look for less traveled roads, parks, etc. Also, the pollution at airports is generally among the worst in the city; so try to avoid spending unnecessary time there.

*"Have you ever noticed that anyone driving slower than you is an idiot, and anyone driving faster than you is a maniac?" George Carlin. ♥*



## SUPPLEMENTS: WHAT'S HOT— WHAT'S NOT

Here at Cardiovascular Consultants we have been telling our patients for the past few years that they do not need to take a vitamin E supplement because studies show that they do not improve cardiac health. Now according to a large study published in the November 2004 issue of the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, high-dose vitamin E might even slightly increase risk of death. This study was a meta-analysis (a combination of all the large trials on a topic) that included over 135,000 participants in 19 clinical trials taking doses of vitamin E ranging from 16 units to 2000 IU per day. At doses of 400 IU or higher, a slightly increased risk (five percent) of death was noted, with the risk increasing to eight percent as the dose escalated up to 2,000 IU per day. A small improvement in risk of death was noted when the dose was less than 100 IU.

Like all essential nutrients, vitamin E is important for health, but more is not necessarily better. The CardioTabs multivitamin currently contains 100 IU of the natural form of vitamin E, and that dose will be reduced even further to 75 IU in the first quarter of 2005. At either of these doses, small benefits appear to be present for the heart and the brain. However, we do not recommend that you take a separate supplement of vitamin E.

On the other hand, new studies are reported each month documenting the impressive benefits of omega-3 supplements. What is good for the heart is good for the brain. A study this year in the journal *Stroke* found that omega-3 reduced the risk of stroke by about 31 percent in people eating fish five or more times per week. To achieve this level of intake you need to take about three capsules of CardioTabs Omega-3 daily. Other studies show remarkable similarity in the risks for heart disease and Alzheimer's. Accordingly, we are finding that interventions to improve heart health such as exercise, fish oil, statins, blood pressure lowering drugs, aspirin, and a healthy diet are good for the brain too. ♥

# CardioScan Detects Coronary Artery Plaque Despite Good HDL Cholesterol Levels in Women

## THE WHISPER STUDY

Cardiovascular disease is the number one cause of death in women. Women are more likely to die from their first heart attack than men, and 60 percent of sudden cardiac death occurs in the absence of warning symptoms or a known history of coronary artery disease (CAD), hence the catch phrase, "The Silent Epidemic." Traditional risk factors related to the development of plaque in the coronary arteries of women include age, menopause, family history of premature CAD, nicotine abuse, abnormal cholesterol, high blood pressure and diabetes. Over 80 percent of heart attacks can be prevented and an estimated 100,000 lives could be saved each year if we used aggressive primary prevention with strict risk factor modification.

Coronary artery calcification represents the presence of calcified plaque in the vessel walls supplying blood to the heart. The calcium burden correlates with the severity of plaque and is felt to be an early predictor of cardiovascular events, including heart attack and sudden cardiac death. A special type of CT scan, also known in our office as the CardioScan, has the ability to quantify the amount of calcified plaque in the coronary arteries and provides a calcium score. A normal score is zero. This has been primarily investigated as a tool to predict the probability of CAD and predict risk for future coronary events.

Although soft plaque which has not calcified may not be detected, the CardioScan may detect calcified plaque before it shows up on a stress test. Furthermore, declines in calcium scores have been correlated with the reduction of LDL (bad) cholesterol. This could challenge the threshold to initiating cholesterol lowering medicines, even in the setting of excellent HDL (good) values and normal total

cholesterol to HDL ratios, which is seen more often in women than men.



The WHISPER (*Women's Hearts: Ischemic Screening with Proactive Evaluation and Recommendations*) study was

designed to identify women without a history of cardiovascular disease, but who are at increased risk for future heart attacks and to prospectively follow them over time. In this study, women between the ages of 45 to 65 who had more than two unmodified risk factors and a recent normal nuclear stress test were considered. CardioScan imaging was then performed to identify the presence of coronary artery plaque not detected by nuclear stress tests and to monitor its progression during a two-year risk modification program. Risk factors are monitored, including success in blood pressure and cholesterol

control as well as weight loss. A repeat CardioScan is performed in two years and compared to the baseline and the impact of interval risk factor modification will be addressed.

One hundred women have been enrolled into WHISPER. Despite normal stress tests, an unexpected 42 percent have coronary artery plaque as detected by the CardioScan! Furthermore, the majority have excellent HDL (good) cholesterol and normal total/HDL ratios. The LDL (bad) cholesterol is elevated, but has been untreated prior to this study due to a common perception that a high HDL is protective against coronary plaque! The results of the baseline WHISPER enrollment were selected for poster presentation at the American Heart Association Annual Scientific Meeting in New Orleans and received acknowledgement in the session as one of the top five clinical studies! The two-year follow-up studies will be completed in March 2006. ♥

**Tracy L. Stevens, M.D.**  
**Lyndy Volker, M.S.**

**Plan now to attend an informative and inspirational public forum to learn about the latest innovations in women's heart health, heart failure and heart transplantation.**



**FEBRUARY 17, 2005**  
**COME AT YOUR CONVENIENCE THROUGHOUT THE AFTERNOON OR EVENING 2 TO 8 P.M.**  
**KAUFFMAN CONFERENCE CENTER**  
**4801 ROCKHILL ROAD, KANSAS CITY, MO.**  
**TRACY STEVENS, M.D. WILL SPEAK FROM 4:30 TO 5:30 P.M. AND 7:15 TO 8:15 P.M.**  
**ANDREW KAO, M.D., WILL SPEAK FROM 3 TO 4 P.M. AND 6 TO 7 P.M.**

For more information call NurseLine at (816) 932-6220 or go to [saintlukeshealthsystem.org](http://saintlukeshealthsystem.org).

# Living the Mediterranean Diet and Lifestyle

This summer Joan and I took our family to La Ciotat, a small village on the Mediterranean coast in southern France. This is the home of the real Mediterranean diet and we found it to be the most delicious and healthiest cuisine we have ever experienced.

I also could not help but notice that the women of all ages tended to have small, sexy waists, and smooth and beautiful complexions.

And it wasn't that these people were fitness buffs. There was only one gym in town, and it was used for playing squash. They didn't get their toned abs from doing hundreds of sit-ups daily or taking some weight loss supplement. No, their beautiful flat tummies are the byproduct of an active lifestyle and a diet that keeps their hormones in the healthy youthful ranges.

In contrast, the average overweight American continues his or her futile struggle with 'Ab-blasters' machines and weight loss supplements, while eating synthetic food loaded with trans fats and sugar, and drinking soft drinks full of high-fructose corn syrup and spending most of the day in front of a TV/computer screen or behind a windshield.

The Mediterranean diet is the eating style commonly followed by the people of southern France, Italy and Greece. These populations traditionally eat predominantly fresh healthy foods like fish, vegetables, nuts, fruits whole grains and olive oil, and drink water, red wine, tea and coffee. This diet is much closer to our natural human hunter-gatherer eating pattern; and very different from the majority of western diets that contain relatively large amounts of fatty meats and processed carbohydrates like white flour and sugar.

When Americans hear Mediterranean diet, we think pasta and pizza. In fact, these people do eat some of these foods and French bread too. But the portion sizes of these starches are

small. The striking difference in their diet, however, is the amount of fresh produce, fish and lean meat they eat.

Each morning the market was crowded with people, all filling their carts with a remarkable variety of delicious fresh veggies and fruits. The largest line in the store was at the fish counter, where you could choose from over 30 different varieties of fresh fish



and shell fish. The Mediterraneans prepare their food with olive oil, and eat minimal fried foods. They also are not big on packaged, processed foods.

And although the Mediterraneans love their coffee, tea, red wine, cheese, milk, and even cigarettes, their rate of heart disease is much lower than in America. In fact the cholesterol of the Mediterranean people is essentially the same as in America or other westernized nations, yet they have much lower rates of heart attack, stroke and Alzheimer's disease. One of the main reasons is their high intake of omega-3 fats, fresh fruits and veggies.

Today, you can eat the Mediterranean diet anywhere, anytime. Your choices may be a bit more limited, but fresh produce, lean meat, and fish are almost always available. You will have to develop the discipline to get to the store more often to keep fresh food on hand, but if you want a beautiful body, and a healthy heart, it is well worth it.

Just like the townspeople of La Ciotat, you should try to get to your

local supermarket every other day, and spend just a few minutes there picking up fresh items. Literally tens of thousands of scientific studies make it abundantly clear that following the right lifestyle can extend the average person's healthy lifespan a number of years.

Yet another testimony to the power of diet and exercise was published Sept. 23, 2004 in the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* examining mortality for 2,339 men and women from several European countries. This rigorously conducted study concluded that adopting four simple lifestyle habits cut mortality risk during a 10-year period by about 65 percent. The researchers found regular physical activity (defined as at least 30 minutes of activity per day) conferred a 37 percent decreased risk of death (from any cause)

and not smoking was associated with a 35 percent lower risk. Consuming a Mediterranean diet lowered the mortality risk by 23 percent, and mild to moderate alcohol use was associated with a 22 percent lower risk.

These habits reduced mortality rates for both heart disease and cancer to a similar degree. Following all four of these diet/lifestyle recommendations dropped the risk of dying from any cause during the study period by two-thirds, compared to practicing one or none of the 'fab 4' healthy habits. In another report appearing in the same issue of *JAMA*, Katherine Esposito M.D. and colleagues found that the Mediterranean diet decreased the incidence of the metabolic syndrome (obesity and pre-diabetes), and improved blood vessel health/function, and lowered insulin resistance. The Mediterranean diet also reduces inflammation as measured by CRP, and decreases homocysteine and fibrinogen, which cause arterial disease and aging. ♥

By James H. O'Keefe, M.D.



FROM THE  
**HEART**

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## **POLICOSANOL: EFFECTIVE OVER-THE-COUNTER CHOLESTEROL-LOWERING AGENT** *Continued from page 1*

Policosanol does not, however, use the same pathway as the statins, the prescription cholesterol-lowering drugs (such as Lipitor, Crestor, Pravachol, and Lescol).

In rigorous recent scientific studies, policosanol lowered cholesterol about as well as the older statins (like Pravachol and lovastatin). In one side-by-side comparison study, 10 mg. policosanol reduced the LDL cholesterol 24 percent, compared to 22 percent for lovastatin 20 mg. Also, policosanol is an effective option for raising HDL cholesterol (which is notoriously difficult to increase) by approximately five to 10 percent. The HDL cholesterol particles are highly protective because they act as scavengers cleaning up any cholesterol deposits in your arteries.

In animal studies, policosanol has been shown to inhibit the development of atherosclerotic plaques. This compound also seems to be able to inhibit the oxidation of LDL, a critical step in causing the chronic inflammation that promotes progression of atherosclerosis

and adverse events like heart attack and stroke.

Policosanol is a natural supplement made from plant compounds found widely in nature, and appears to be a non-toxic substance. When rats were given over 1,700 times the usual human dose, no toxicity was noted. Monkeys, dogs, and even human subjects have been given several times the standard dose without any adverse effects.

Long-term studies lasting two years or more show no serious adverse effects from policosanol. In a study of more than 3,000 people, only 26 patients on policosanol dropped out due to side effects. The most frequent complaint in a study lasting two and one-half years was mild weight loss. One of the findings of this large trial was that people taking policosanol had significantly lower rates of hospitalizations and reduced adverse cardiac events,

like heart attack.

Postmenopausal women at risk for heart disease, people over age 60, and diabetics have all been tested on policosanol with good results. In one trial where policosanol was used in people with blocked leg arteries, the drug significantly improved the maximum distance a person could walk before having to stop. Policosanol has some anti-clotting activity and so it is not recommended for people who are on warfarin (Coumadin).

CardioTea with policosanol is a dietary supplement that contains 20 mg. of policosanol and high concentrations of antioxidants from green tea. One tablet of CardioTea with policosanols daily is a highly effective supplement for keeping cholesterol levels under control, especially in people who cannot or will not take a statin. Additionally, we use CardioTea with policosanol as a supplement for people already on a statin who continue to run cholesterol levels outside of the ideal range. ♥