

# Health PERSPECTIVES

"Practical Insights Into The World Of Natural Healing."

Heart Health: The Complete Regimen.

## Going Beyond Statin Drugs Dietary Modifications with Flax



*Once, not so long ago, the intake of saturated fat was postulated to be the main risk factor for coronary heart disease. It was also postulated that the noxious effects of saturated fatty acids was primarily through the increase in serum cholesterol.*

This is why today many doctors prescribe cholesterol-lowering drugs such as the statins to

patients with high cholesterol levels.

The statins work, their risk of side effects notwithstanding. To date, five major, randomized, placebo-controlled statin trials have convincingly shown that total mortality and major coronary events can be significantly reduced by lowering levels of low-density lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL) with statin therapy.<sup>1</sup>

But, do not assume statin therapy is the only pathway to heart health, particularly for persons in non-life threatening situations who prefer natural healing pathways or for whom statin therapy should not be a first choice. And no patient should, for a moment, believe statins can provide the help associated with a healthy diet and regular exercise.

### **The Cretan Diet vs. the Standard Post-Heart Attack Diet**

When people have a heart attack and are fortunate enough to have survived such an acute life-threatening situation, their doctor usually will recommend a new standard post-heart attack diet, much lower in saturated fat, to prevent a second heart attack. The American Heart Association (AHA) Step I and II diets have been widely recommended as components of treatment for patients at risk of coronary heart disease. But cutting edge research shows us that simply lowering saturated fat intake is not enough.

Whether you have had a first heart attack or want to prevent one, to get the most out of your diet you need to be sure to add the omega-3 fatty acids to your health regimen.

These essential fatty acids are available from both select seafood sources (e.g., wild salmon and tuna) and flax. We recommend a combination of both.

In some intervention trials, simply reducing saturated fat intake was not enough to reduce heart disease mortality. Only when the diet was enriched with omega-3 fatty acids, especially alpha-linolenic acid (ALA) derived from flaxseed oil, was cardiac death reduced, say researchers.<sup>2</sup>

Alpha-linolenic acid is considered the major omega-3 fatty acid since it is converted by the body to the omega-3 fatty acids derived from seafood. ALA is found in the highest amounts in flaxseed oil.

Studies have not only shown that ALA prevents ventricular fibrillation, the chief mechanism of cardiac death, researchers have also observed that among the omega-3 fatty acids, ALA "may be more efficient to prevent ventricular fibrillation than eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA)," which are names of the omega-3 fatty acids found in seafood. But, these findings notwithstanding, adding baked or grilled salmon or tuna to your diet on a regular basis covers all your bases when it comes to the omega-3 fatty acids.

In addition, it has been shown ALA is the main fatty acid for reducing platelet aggregation, an important step in preventing blood clotting and subsequent heart attacks or stroke.

### **Cretan Diet vs. Standard Post-Heart Attack Diet**

The diet with the greatest life expectancy in the western world is that of Crete. The Cretan diet is largely vegetarian with a high intake of alpha-linolenic acid (from various vegetable oils) and oleic acid (from olive oil).

In one study of 600 patients, the Cretan diet was compared to the usual diet now recommended for patients after a first heart attack. The Cretan diet reduced, within a few months, all causes of mortality and cardiovascular events by more than 70%. Thus a highly palatable diet adapted from Crete seems to be much more efficient to prevent recurrences and death after a first myocardial infarction.

Interestingly, these protective effects were not related to serum concentrations of total, low-density-lipoprotein, or high-density-lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol.<sup>3</sup> It is thought that the Cretan diet protects against heart and circulatory problems because of changes in plasma fatty acids, especially an increase in omega-3 fatty acids and oleic acid, and lower intakes of saturated fatty acids and omega-6 fatty acids.

Fortunately, the American Heart Association is always seeking ways to help persons prevent heart and circulatory disease and is open to new ideas.

This may be why this year, the AHA all but endorsed the Cretan-style diet as a means of improving it's own standard heart disease prevention. Writing in the AHA journal, *Circulation*, Drs. Rose Marie Robertson and Lynn Smaha note that the Lyon Diet Heart Study, similar to the Cretan, diet provides interesting and potentially significant enhancements to the dietary management currently provided by the AHA Step I and II diets.<sup>4</sup> They note that at the core, there are many similarities between the AHA Step diets and the Mediterranean-style diet; however, the Lyon diet added specificity regarding form and types of fat-containing foods and oils. In particular they note that alpha-linolenic acid was provided as a supplement. Of additional note is the work on the importance

of omega-3 fatty acids and their antithrombotic effects.

These results of the Lyon Diet Heart Study are highly significant and, if confirmed, would provide substantially enhanced methods of reducing coronary heart disease and its risk.

### Omega-3 Fatty Acids & Women's Heart Disease Risk

Apparently this same diet specifically protects women from heart disease, say researchers from the Department of Nutrition, Harvard School of Public Health.<sup>5</sup> These researchers looked at food-frequency data gathered from some 76,283 women without previously diagnosed cancer or cardiovascular disease. During 10 years of follow-up, they documented 232 cases of fatal heart attacks and 597 cases of nonfatal heart attacks. A higher intake of alpha-linolenic acid was associated with a lower relative risk of fatal heart attacks with the women consuming the highest amounts of this omega-3 fatty acid experiencing a risk reduction of about half. A higher intake of oil and vinegar salad dressing, an important source of alpha-linolenic acid, was associated with reduced risk of fatal heart attacks when women who consumed this food five or six times a week were compared with those who rarely consumed it. The researchers conclude: Higher consumption of foods such as oil-based salad dressing that provide polyunsaturated fats, including alpha-linolenic acid, may reduce the risk of fatal heart attacks.

### The Doctors Prescription

Without side effects, a higher intake of omega-3 fatty acids is part of the nutritional answer to reducing risk of heart attacks and stroke. Although flaxseed oil is the richest source of omega-3 fatty acids, we have found that some readers prefer ground flaxseed, which they then add to their cereals or yogurt or simply eat as a snack. Either flaxseed oil or ground flaxseed will provide optimal amounts of omega-3 fatty acids, especially all-important alpha-linolenic acid. Milled flaxseed products taste great, which makes it very easy to consume the recommended two to four tablespoons daily. However, flax oil provides approximately four times the amount of omega-3 fatty acids as milled flax. Either is a great addition to the diet, especially for persons who wish to do all that they can to reduce their risk of a heart attack or stroke.

We also recommend seafood sources of omega-3 fatty acids.

### How to Find the Best Lignan Flax Oil

Be sure the company that produces your flax is M.A.D. about fresh lignan flax oil. Here's what to look for when it comes to being M.A.D. about fresh flax:

- **Made to Order.** Be sure your flax oil is made to order. Most nutritional oil companies rely on third-party distributors to stock, inventory and ultimately deliver their products to market, sometimes months after manufacturing. For this reason, most flaxseed oil today is dated for freshness for up to one year. This is too long for a perishable, electron-rich, live food, like flaxseed oil. What's more, these products are typically shipped by ground transportation resulting in prolonged delivery and conditions such as high heat that may degrade the oil. Worse yet, some companies have resorted to refining and or filtering their oil in order to artificially extend shelf life. Be sure your flax oil is made to order, and that the oil is pressed the day it is ordered.
- **Air Delivered.** Once fresh pressed, be sure your flax oil is rushed by air delivery, manufacturer-direct, to your favorite natural health center or health professional, arriving within days of being made.
- **Dated for Freshness.** Be sure your flax oil comes coded with both a Fresh Pressed date and a Freshest Before date stamp spanning

a period of only four months for maximum potency and freshness. Prolonged distributor delivery and warehoused product makes it necessary for other brands to date stamp their oil for six to twelve months. Good for them, not so good for you.

This service is called Fresh ExPress and it guarantees you the absolute freshest flax oil anywhere. You will find this type of extremely high-quality lignan flax oil in the refrigerator sections of natural health centers nationwide.

### References:

1. Waters, D.D. "Are we aggressive enough in lowering cholesterol?" Am J Cardiol, 2001;16;88(4Suppl):10-15.
2. Lanzmann-Petithory, D. "Alpha-linolenic acid and cardiovascular diseases." J Nutr Health Aging, 2001;5(3):179-183.
3. footnote\* Renaud, S. "Cretan Mediterranean diet for prevention of coronary heart disease." Am J Clin Nutr, 1995;61(6 Suppl):1360S-1367S.
4. Robertson, R.M. & Smaha, L. "Can a Mediterranean-style diet reduce heart disease." Circulation, 2001;103:1821.
5. Hu, F.B., et al. "Dietary intake of alpha-linolenic acid and risk of fatal ischemic heart disease among women." Am J Clin Nutr, 1999;69(5):890-897.



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