



P H Y S I C I A N S
C O M M I T T E E
F O R
R E S P O N S I B L E
M E D I C I N E

5100 WISCONSIN AVENUE, N.W. • SUITE 400
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20016
T: (202) 686-2210 • F: (202) 686-2216
PCRM@PCRM.ORG • WWW.PCRM.ORG

October 21, 2008

Dear Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee Members:

It is essential that the Dietary Guidelines address Americans as they are. That is, most Americans are overweight, the vast majority have the beginnings of atherosclerosis, if not fully developed cardiovascular disease, and many have other diet-related health problems, such as hypertension or diabetes. It is a mistake to draft Guidelines as if Americans are healthy and trim.

By way of introduction, I am a physician and clinical researcher who studies the clinical effects of nutritional interventions. More and more research shows that low-fat, plant-based diets are most effective for prevention and treatment of chronic diseases that plague our nation.

Diabetes:

In a 22-week study, 99 people with type 2 diabetes were randomly assigned to follow either a low-fat, low-glycemic vegan diet or a diet based on American Diabetes Association (ADA) recommendations. Improvements in blood glucose, lipids, and body weight were all greater in the vegan group. (Barnard 2006)

Heart Disease:

In the early nineties, Dr. Dean Ornish studied 47 patients, all of whom had atherosclerotic plaques that were clearly visible on angiograms. He assigned half the research subjects to a control group in which they received the standard care that doctors prescribe (e.g., a diet centered on “lean” meat, poultry, and fish, along with various medications and advice not to smoke). The remaining patients were assigned to an experimental group that followed a very different regimen, including a low-fat vegetarian diet, moderate exercise, smoking cessation and stress reduction. One year later, all patients had a second angiogram to measure the blockages in their coronary arteries. The results showed that the control-group patients, as a group, had not improved. In fact, the blockages in their coronary arteries were worse, on average, than at the beginning of the study. They still had chest pain and still needed medications. For the patients in the special intervention group, however, chest pain diminished within weeks. Their cholesterol levels dropped dramatically without cholesterol-lowering drugs. At the end of one year, 82 percent of the patients following a vegetarian diet showed measurable reversal of their coronary artery blockages. (Ornish 1990)

According to a Cleveland Clinic physician and surgeon, “The single biggest step toward adopting this strategy would be to have United States Dietary Guidelines support a plant-based diet.” (Esselstyn 2001) He bases this opinion on his own research with low-fat diets and heart disease.

Overweight/Obesity:

In a weight loss study with 64 overweight postmenopausal women, those on the low-fat vegan diet did better than those following the National Cholesterol Education Program guidelines. The vegan group lost a median of 11 pounds at one year, compared with four pounds for the control group. At the two-year mark, the vegan group had lost approximately seven pounds from baseline, compared with approximately two pounds for the control group. (Turner-McGrievy 2007)

Cancer:

Dr. Dean Ornish, the lead researcher on studies showing lifestyle changes can reverse heart disease, conducted another lifestyle modifications pilot for prostate cancer. In this study, a low-fat (10% of calories from fat), whole-foods, plant-based diet among men with low-risk prostate cancer decreased their tumor progression after only three months. In addition to significant improvements in weight, abdominal obesity, blood pressure, and lipid profile were observed. (Ornish 2008)

A review of 76 studies published in *Nutrition Reviews* showed that men who increase consumption of cancer-fighting vegetarian foods and avoid foods that feed tumor growth may significantly increase chances of living longer after prostate cancer diagnosis. Among men with the highest intake of saturated fat, the risk of dying from prostate cancer is three times higher than among men with the lowest intake, the authors found. (Berkow 2007)

In light of recent publications highlighting the benefits of low-fat vegetarian and vegan diets, I think that a critically important question in need of an Evidence-based Review by this esteemed committee is, "What role can low-fat vegetarian and vegan diets play in the prevention and treatment of chronic diseases, particularly obesity, cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, and cancer"?

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Neal Barnard MD". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Neal Barnard, M.D.

REFERENCES

Barnard ND, Cohen, J, Jenkins DJ, et al. A low-fat, vegan diet improves glycemic control and cardiovascular risk factors in a randomized clinical trial in individuals with type 2 diabetes. *Diabetes Care*. 2006;29(8):1777-83.

Ornish D, Brown SE, Scherwitz LW, et al. Can lifestyle changes reverse coronary heart disease? *Lancet* 1990;336:129-33.

Esselstyn CB Jr. Resolving the Coronary Artery Disease Epidemic Through Plant-Based Nutrition. *Prev Cardiol*. 2001;4:171-177.

Turner-McGrievy GM, Barnard ND, Scialli AR. A two-year randomized weight loss trial comparing a vegan diet to a more moderate low-fat diet. *Obesity*. 2007;15:2276-81.

Ornish D, Magbanua MJ, Weidner G, Weinberg V, Kemp C, Green C, Mattie MD, Marlin R, Simko J, Shinohara K, Haqq CM, Carroll PR. Changes in prostate gene expression in men undergoing an intensive nutrition and lifestyle intervention. *Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A*. 2008;105:8369-74. Epub 2008 Jun 16.

Berkow SE, Barnard ND, Saxe GA, Ankerberg-Nobis T. Diet and survival after prostate cancer diagnosis. *Nutr Rev*. 2007;65:391-403.