

## Health Insurer Suggests That Physicians Recommend a Plant-Based Lifestyle to All of Their Patients

Kaiser Permanente, the largest non-profit healthcare company in the U.S., suggests that physicians recommend a plant-based lifestyle to all of their patients. An article in the Spring 2013 issue of *The Permanente Journal* provides a nutritional update for physicians. Authored by three medical doctors and a registered dietician, the article suggests that the adoption of a whole food, plant-based lifestyle is a cost effective lifestyle intervention that could benefit all patients, especially those with cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and obesity. In the midst of a nationwide health care crisis, they acknowledge that unhealthy lifestyles are contributing to the vastly increased incidence of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and obesity.

Their definition of a plant-based lifestyle is one which encourages whole plant foods and discourages meat, dairy products, and eggs, as well as refined and processed foods. In the case study presented, they demonstrate that the potential magnitude of improvement from this dietary lifestyle change can and often does exceed that experienced from pharmaceutical interventions alone.

The authors of the article explain that a review of the current scientific literature further supports their assertions. A review of data from 87 studies was reported in a 2006 issue of *Nutrition Reviews*. The authors concluded that following a low-fat, plant-based lifestyle was highly effective for weight loss, that the weight loss was not dependent upon exercise, and that the weight loss occurred at an average rate of 1 pound per week. A study published in the June 2011 issue of *The Journal of the American Dietetic Association* found that those following this lifestyle were also found to consume more magnesium, potassium, iron, thiamin, riboflavin, folate, and less total fat. The authors concluded that plant-based lifestyles were nutrient dense and can be recommended without compromising diet quality. In the May 2010 issue of the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, researchers recommend this lifestyle for the prevention of obesity in children. Plant-based diets are low in energy density and high in complex carbohydrate, fiber, and water, which may increase satiety and resting metabolic rate.

With regard to the prevention and management of type II diabetes, the article sites a study by Neal Barnard, MD. A low-fat, plant-based lifestyle was pitted against the American Diabetes Association (ADA) dietary guidelines. Those following the animal product-free lifestyle reduced A1C levels by 1.23 points versus 0.38 points for those

following the ADA diet. In addition, 43% of those following the plant-based lifestyle were able to reduce their medication regimen compared with 26% of those on the ADA diet.

The article sites studies such as the Lifestyle Heart Trial conducted by Dean Ornish, MD, which demonstrated that 82% of the study participants that followed his program experienced some level of regression of their atherosclerosis. So not only was the disease progression halted, it was also reversed to varying degrees.

The authors encourage staff to be knowledgeable about plant-based nutrition. They suggest that their hospitals, cafeterias, and physicians' meeting facilities serve meals that are consistent with a plant-based lifestyle, and they recommend patients that are obese or suffer from cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or diabetes complete a course on nutrition that emphasizes a plant-based lifestyle.

They end the article with the following paragraph, "Too often, physicians ignore the potential benefits of good nutrition and quickly prescribe medications instead of giving patients a chance to correct their disease through healthy eating and active living. If we are to slow down the obesity epidemic and reduce the complications of chronic disease, we must consider changing our culture's mindset from "live to eat" to "eat to live." The future of health care will involve an evolution toward a paradigm where the prevention and treatment of disease is centered, not on a pill or surgical procedure, but on another serving of fruits and vegetables."

I encourage you to read the entire article, which can be found on my web site at the following link:

[The Permanente Journal Spring 2013.pdf](#)