

Cardiovascular Health & Heart Disease

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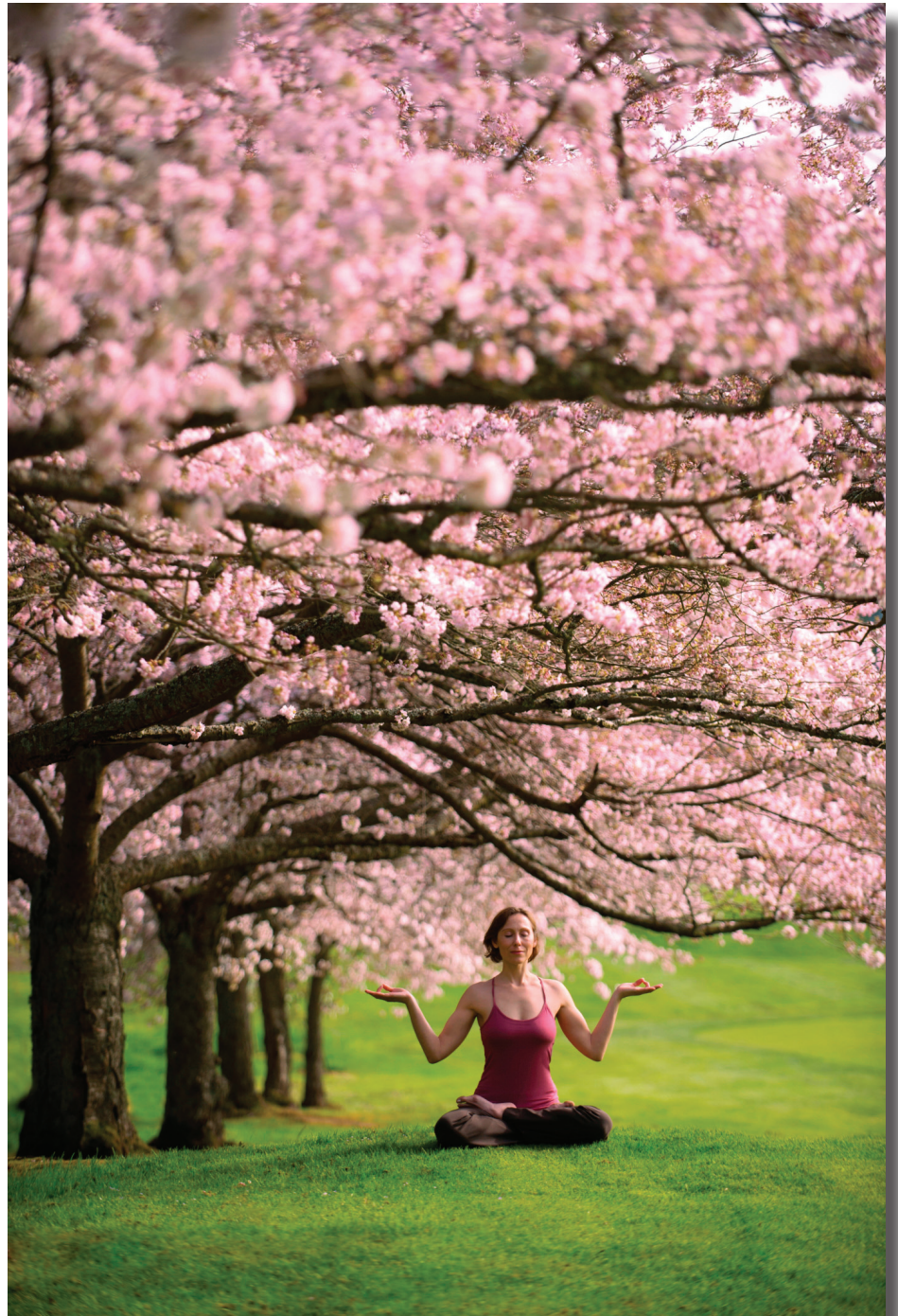
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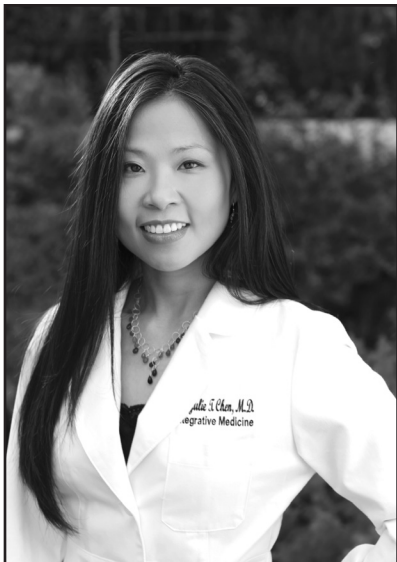
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Dr. Julie

by Julie T. Chen, MD
www.makinghealthyez.com

It Seems that Diets Do Matter in Preventing Heart Disease

One of my clinic patients told me recently that her primary care doctor said that her diet and lifestyle change doesn't matter; that her high cholesterol requires a statin drug and that's the only thing which will affect her heart disease risks. This particular patient had been proudly telling her primary care doctor that she had been eating a low-sugar and low-saturated-fat diet and is now working out five days a week and losing weight – yet the doctor's response was that diet and exercise don't matter? That only a statin drug is her saving grace?

Well, how about she eat right and exercise so that she doesn't need a statin drug? That is better for her overall health, isn't it?

The *New England Journal of Medicine* published at the end of February 2013 says that diet is in fact extremely beneficial and that this patient's primary care doctor is wrong ... that diet in fact matters when it comes to heart health.

I am a firm believer that if we create a strong foundation with our lifestyle, we can age well and much more healthfully. Of course, we all age and there may come a time when medications are required no matter how great our diet and exercise habits are, but shouldn't we all start with a strong foundation of healthful lifestyle first?

To me, it is ridiculous to give someone medications and say that they can just keep living the unhealthy lifestyle that got her there as long as she takes the pill. It is unfortunate that we all may come across one disease state or another, but when we do, we should first make efforts in changing the habits that got us there. Then, when we have done that, if we still need some help with medications or supplements, then it is of course appropriate. To say that a healthful diet and exercise are unimportant is absolutely ludicrous when we as practitioners have the job of instituting health measures for our patients.

This patient's situation is interesting because now that she has incorporated these lifestyle changes, her recent cholesterol and sugar tests are back to normal. When she was eating poorly and not exercising, she was having issues with both high cholesterol and high sugar. To say that her diet and exercise change made no difference is ridiculous ... clearly the labs favorably agree with the healthy glow and high energy that she carries herself with now.

In my experience, if the healthful lifestyle is implemented, not only do the labs start to look great, but so does the patient. Usually, the patient has more energy, less pain, easier time with sleep, and glowing skin, to name just a few benefits.

The study in the *New England Journal of Medicine* was a multicenter trial done in Spain that looked at 7447 people aged 55 to 80 years old, 57% of them women. One group was assigned the Mediterranean diet with extra-virgin olive oil and another group got the same diet with nuts. The control group were told to eat a low-saturated-fat, more healthful diet but weren't given the Mediterranean diet guidelines or additional olive oil or nuts. They were given non-food-related gifts instead of olive oil or nuts.

The outcome showed that over the course of 4.8 years on a Mediterranean-style diet, patients had 30% decreased risk of heart disease. This clearly shows that diet is important to our overall and cardiovascular health.

If you are unsure what a Mediterranean diet is, I can give you some guidelines. But for those of you who are cooks and enjoy learning more about food, fortunately, the Internet these days is very helpful at giving you heart healthful Mediterranean-style recipes. Just use the keywords "Mediterranean diet" and the recipe for the type of food that you want to make. In general, stay away from premade processed versions of food. The key types of foods found in the Mediterranean diet are nuts, olive oil, avocados, fresh vegetables and fruits, fish, and moderate levels of meat and wine. Because the studies are also very favorable for plant-based diet as far as anti-inflammation goes, I tend to have my patients focus more on the fresh vegetables, nuts, legumes, and olive oil.

So for those patients who are amazing and making great strides in implementing a healthful lifestyle with an anti-inflammatory Mediterranean type diet as well as exercising regularly, if your primary care doctors tell you that it's worthless, make sure that you point them to this study ... and there are also many other past studies that clearly state the benefits of diet for overall health improvements.

Julie T. Chen, MD, is board-certified in internal medicine and is also fellowship-trained and board-certified in integrative medicine. She has her own medical practice in San Jose, California; is the medical director of corporation wellness at several Silicon Valley-based corporations; is on several medical expert panels of websites as well as nonprofit organizations; is a recurring monthly columnist for several national magazines; and has been featured in radio, newspaper, and magazine interviews. She incorporates healing modalities into her practice, including but not limited to medical acupuncture, Chinese scalp acupuncture, clinical hypnotherapy, strain-counterstrain osteopathic manipulations, and biofeedback.