

Take heart

Diet can reverse disease's course

The idea that heart disease might be reversible has been suggested for years.

Artery-clogging deposits shrink, for example, when laboratory animals are put on very low-fat diets. During the two world wars, when many people subsisted on near-starvation rations, pathologists found during autopsies that people's arteries were remarkably free of cholesterol deposits.

Perhaps the first convincing evidence that cholesterol deposits could actually regress came from a post-mortem study of Nathan Pritikin's heart (of Pritikin Diet fame).

At the time of his mild heart attack in 1955, Pritikin's blood cholesterol was 280. Over the next 30 years, he followed an exercise program, running several miles weekly, and adopted a high carbohydrate, low-fat, low-cholesterol diet. One year before his death from cancer in 1985, his cholesterol had dropped to 94. At autopsy, his coronary arteries were found to be free of fatty deposits.

FOUR MAJOR studies in humans have now shown that lowering blood cholesterol levels can retard the progression of heart disease and, in some cases, even reduce the degree of blood vessel blockages. Three of the studies involved powerful cholesterol-lowering drugs. One of these, conducted at the University of Southern California, included 80 patients who had coronary artery bypass surgery. Fatty deposits clogging the blood vessels shrank visibly in 13 men taking drugs. None, however, demonstrated complete regression of disease. The deposits shrank in only two of the untreated men.

More recently, Dr. Dean Ornish and colleagues reported even more impressive improvements without drugs after one year. Twenty-eight cardiac patients were assigned to a comprehensive lifestyle change program that included a low-fat vegetarian diet, stopping smoking, stress-management training and moderate exercise. These patients were compared to a usual-care control group.

Using computer-enhanced X-rays of the heart's blood vessels, Ornish found that the average degree of clogging dropped from 61 percent to 56 percent. In the control group, blockages progressed from 62 percent to 64 percent. Overall, 82 percent of the experimental-group patients had an average decrease in partial regression of heart disease, can occur, but only in some people. Moreover, there appears to be only

fitness

Barry Franklin

one potential drawback to the use of lifestyle programs to reverse heart disease. Recently, medical researchers reported that monkeys fed ultra-

low-fat diets, as opposed to standard monkey chow, were nearly twice as aggressive, making nastier faces and screaming more. So far, at least, no patients, in Dr. Ornish's group have exhibited such tendencies.

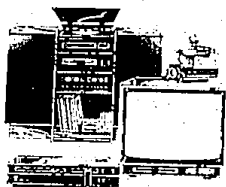
Barry A. Franklin, Ph.D., is director, Cardiac Rehabilitation and Exercise Laboratories, William Beaumont Hospital, Royal Oak, and associate professor of physiology, Wayne State University, School of Medicine.



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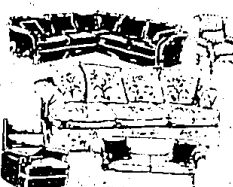
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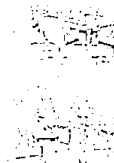
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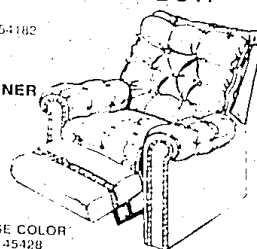
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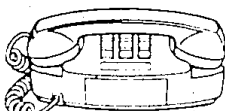
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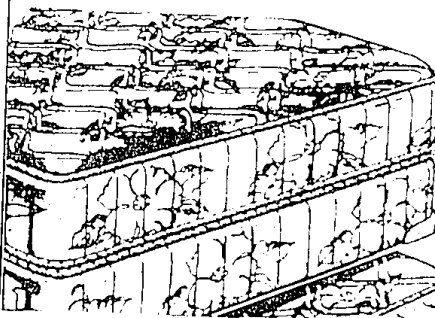


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