

Proper diet and exercise can make profound changes in health

Dr. Rupa Shah, Thursday, November 22, 2012, 08:00 Hrs [IST]

"Let food be thy medicine, and let thy medicine be food." Hippocrates The majority of modern day diseases are nothing but 'food borne' diseases. Hence proper diet and exercise can make profound changes in one's health.

A vegan diet and exercise like walking for 30 minutes daily can bring in major changes in our health. Whatever we eat, we become. This is the truth. Meat, eggs & even dairy products are the major source of cholesterol. When we choose plant-based, whole foods, we tend to eliminate all the dietary cholesterol from our diet as there is no cholesterol in plant kingdom.

Recently, Hiren, aged 42, a senior executive of a very large corporation came to my clinic. He leads a very busy life, travels a lot and has to eat out often. He was suffering from tiredness and discolouration of skin. He was a bit over weight, but had no other complaints. The skin discolouration was visible and he was very concerned about it.

Since I prefer to check all my patients 'health parameters' after I have finished checking weight, blood pressure etc, I asked him to get all his blood tests done including vitamins B12 and D3, which are generally forgotten by many doctors. And as expected, his vitamin B12 was low, so also vitamin D3. His lipid profile was bad, with the cholesterol levels much higher than normal and other lipid readings and the HDL/ LDL ratio also abnormal.

These are indicators of the beginning of modern day diseases related to diet and lifestyle. Now there are two options now for Hiren. The first option is to take 'statins' for rest of his life to lower cholesterol along with the supplements for vitamin B12 and D3. And the second option is to change his diet and lifestyle in such a way that his cholesterol level normalises and he does not need to take 'statins' and in turn suffer their side effects. He may also improve his vitamin D3 levels by increasing his exposure to sunshine. And take vitamin B12 supplements as needed.

Hiren was a bit overweight. He was concerned about the condition of his heart. He was definitely interested in preventive step, rather than relying on medications for rest of his life. He decided to give my suggestions a try. He decided to change his lifestyle and dietary habits. Hiren was advised to try a vegan diet and add some exercise like walking for 30 minutes daily. Given his busy life, he could not follow the exercise advice that well. However, he did follow the diet advice 100 per cent.

He eliminated all the animal products from his diet. This included all the dairy products, milk, cheese, butter, paneer, ghee, curds and anything that contained them etc. He chose to eat from only the following four groups of food: fruits, vegetables, legumes and grains.

Within just three months, the tests were repeated with encouraging results. There was a comfortable weight loss. Hiren's energy levels were good. His skin had improved gradually. He had a very satisfied look in his eyes, as he saw how his blood reports were reflecting his efforts.

If this is the diet that helps him to stay healthy, he is happy to take it on for rest of his life, said Hiren.

Similar is the case of Manish is a 40 year old, fitness freak, but a diabetic and a high blood pressure patient for more than 10 years. Though he tried hard to drive away his illness by exercising heavily, his disease just worsened as the years passed by. He was depressed as he had seen his near ones suffer from the same diseases, and die early.

He read an article in a news paper about how to reverse diabetes through dietary changes. He was curious, as he read the story of a patient who had actually reversed his diabetes in a year's time by just changing his diet! He took all the advice necessary and started on the low fat vegan diet.

A pure vegetarian, who ate dairy at almost every meal, he decided to become 100 per cent vegan! To his surprise, his blood sugar started falling from day third, and he had to start reducing the dosage of his allopathic medications...In just a month's time, he was off all his medications! He was overwhelmed by the speed with which he got this response! He had been struggling for 10 years!

His regular doctor also never told him about this vegan diet to reverse his diabetes! His blood sugar and blood pressure are now within the normal range. "If this is the diet that keeps me healthy, I am happy to follow it for rest of my life! Its far better than taking medicines for the rest of my life. I am ok to leave all the dairy products, if that's what made me sick in the first place! I do not miss any food. In fact I enjoy eating healthier food now. I can eat all fruits that I could not earlier", chimes in Manish. More and more people are now discovering the joy of vegan living! Amongst the major advocates of the vegan lifestyle are doctors like Dr. Neal Barnard who wrote the famous book 'Dr. Neal Barnard's Program for Reversing Diabetes', Dr. Caldwell Esselstyn author of Prevent and Reverse Heart Disease that inspired ex-US President Bill Clinton to take on the vegan lifestyle to reverse his heart condition and shed excess weight, and Dr. John MacDougall, author of many books including the Mc Dougall Plan.

Why no dairy? What is wrong with dairy? Dairy products unfortunately are no more Sattvic. Often an animal is sick, has been given antibiotics, hormones and has high content of pesticides in milk. Even if an animal was well cared for, is healthy...the fact is the cow's milk is best for calf and human milk is best for human baby. In nature, no other species drink milk of another animal. Even the calf stops drinking milk once it is old enough. Humans also do not need milk of another species. Animal milk is food for growth. If we continue to drink milk when we don't need it, it can cause many diseases in body. All the modern day diseases are now linked with excessive dairy consumption.

For those who are vegetarians, it is recommended that they first try for 30 days, giving up all the dairy products 100 per cent from their diet. This is the best way to judge the benefits of vegan diet for their own health. There are many plant-based milks that can be made and used as replacement for the dairy. Examples are rice, almond, coconut, groundnut, sesame milk etc. All the dairy products can be easily replaced by non-dairy products like ground nut yoghurt, coconut milk sweets, rice milk in porridge etc. It is not at all difficult to get going.

What is vegan diet and lifestyle?

Vegan is an international term used for people who follow a plant based lifestyle. The term "vegan" was coined in England in 1944 by Donald Watson, co-founder of the British Vegan Society, to mean "non-dairy vegetarian"; It also means "the doctrine that man should live without exploiting animals." Vegans do not use any animal products as food or otherwise. They do not consume any meat, fish, dairy or eggs. They also do not use leather, silk, pearl etc. in their life. Vegan living is healthy, kind, compassionate and sustainable.

Its easy to link veganism to the Jain concept of Ahimsa, avoidance of violence against living things. Milk and dairy products are considered as Vigai and Maha vigai in Jainism, one of the most scientific of all religions, but we have forgotten this. It's time to pay attention to this ancient knowledge for the sake of our own health as well and the well-being of all living creatures.

"The doctor of the future will no longer treat the human frame with drugs, but rather will cure and prevent disease with nutrition." Thomas Edison

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