

Healing Foods: Chiropractic's Sleeping Giant

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They're not fiber or just carbohydrates, and they're not minerals or vitamins: they're the hundreds, possibly thousands of phytochemicals found in the plant foods we eat. They're called designer foods, pharmafoods, functional foods or nutraceuticals and have been isolated for their health benefits.

You've probably heard of flavones in grapes and dried beans, allyl sulfides in garlic and onions, isothiocyanates and indoles in broccoli, or genistein in soybeans.

For thousands of years we have been consuming health-giving foods. Our ancestors had a vague idea of health and disease, with the wise and seemingly ageless mother extolling her offspring to eat this or that for better health. Tradition was the mother of invention.

Chiropractors have used phytochemicals (in foods) for a hundred years to maintain health without even knowing it. In fact, during the 48 years my father practiced chiropractic, he constantly used healing foods as an adjunct to the chiropractic adjustment.

What chiropractor would allow white bread or refined carbohydrates to cross the threshold of his or her house? Chiropractors know that fresh fruits and vegetables (such as garlic, onions, citrus, grapes and other fruits, soybeans, dried beans, and cruciferous vegetables [including broccoli, cabbage and turnips]) cleanse the body, furnishing it with health-giving nutrients.

But only in the past few decades has science judiciously documented the actual phytochemicals in various foods. Other industrialized nations, particularly Japan and Germany, are forging ahead with designer food research and have made a dedicated national effort to discover the various components in plants and what they do for the human body. In Japan, tonics and herbs have traditionally been used as folk remedies for many centuries. In Germany, numerous biological products are already sold for prevention and treatment of disease.

In freeing the imprisoned genies from the confines of their cell walls, we have discovered that these designer foods (e.g., aged garlic extract, etc.) or phytochemicals can be used to fight various human ailments, including:

- Alzheimer's disease
- immune deficiency
- cancer (including breast and prostate)
- infections
- inflammation
- heart and circulatory disease

In this country, the use of designer foods (phytochemicals) and diet-based disease prevention is becoming the wave of the future. In fact, designer foods are estimated to be one of the fastest-growing portions of the food industry and are expected to earn between \$7.5 and \$9 billion in revenue next year.¹ This booming interest in disease prevention and health seems to grow each day.

We know that diet plays a critical role in health and disease. Epidemiological experts new estimate that some 70 percent of modern diseases are linked to diet. In fact, food supply is the fastest way to make public health changes, says Dr. Herb Pierson (former director of Designer Foods research at National Cancer Institute). Everyday foods could prevent major diseases. But, unfortunately, many of our patients eat a poor diet. Today's food is loaded with unhealthy pesticides, additives, preservatives, and food colorings. These substances adulterate our foods and tax our systems, thus disrupting homeostasis. Anything that disrupts homeostasis can potentially contribute to subluxations.

"There are substances in everyday foods which could prevent cancers, blood clots, or osteoporosis. There is all this potential in the diet," says Dr. Pierson.

In addition to this, specific fruits or vegetables have their own special constituents. "Each orange, for example, is somewhat different from the next. The navels we now eat have one phytochemical fingerprint, with carotenoids, flavonoids, limonoids, phenolic acids and other great things," says Dr. Pierson. "The oranges that my parents eat were smaller, thinner skinned and, although they had many of the same constituents, they were in different proportions and with different qualities. The oranges that my grandparents ate were even smaller and even more thin skinned and with a significantly different phytochemical content.

Our patients are literary "starved" for disease-preventing, healthy foods. The day of processed foods is history: designer foods are here.

Food Labels

Either unintentionally or by design, our foods have changed chemically, says Dr. Pierson. Therefore, science has begun tracking and controlling the contents of food. Many of these constituents are now listed on food labels.

In the future, labels could not only note information on cholesterol, fats and calories, but also the beneficial phytochemicals in the food, such as sulfides, bioflavonoids, and monoterpenoids.

Garlic

Garlic is popular as a designer food. Even if all garlics were the same (which they are not), the way in which garlic is prepared drastically changes its chemical structure. For example, raw garlic is an antibiotic. It kills bacteria, but it also contains allicin, a component so toxic it can burn the stomach.

On the other hand, by adding garlic to boiling water (in making soup), certain sulfur compounds are created which are powerful colon cancer inhibitors. However, different sulfides are created when we saute garlic. One sulfide has been patented as an anti-asthmatic, another may prevent prostaglandins from sending pain messages throughout the body.

The National Cancer Institute (NCI) found a link between reduced colon cancer in China and garlic intake. In studying this correlation, NCI felt it was important to determine the form of garlic best suited to fight colon cancer. Further, there was a need to use a standardized form of garlic (having as many compounds as possible). Therefore, NCI eventually settled on the aged form of garlic extract, because it is effective, standardized, and safe, according to Dr. Pierson.

Aged garlic extract has many applications. Aged garlic extract influences the synthesis of "bad" prostaglandin (apparently important in stimulating cell growth and tumor development), has anti-inflammatory activity and antioxidant effects. In addition, allyl cysteine molecules affect cholesterol

synthesis and stimulate portions of the immune system.

Since aged garlic is food extract, it offers an opportunity to look at the synergism between substances in one food matrix (garlic), as well as looking at each individual substance, or component, and its effects on the body.

Further, aged garlic extract was studied by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), for potentially adverse effects (such as calcium loss from bones or interference with the body's ability to absorb vitamin A). The FDA has found no side effects. In fact, the use of over-the-counter garlic preparations for treatment and prevention of heart disease has recently been approved by European countries.

Designer Foods Symposium

At the Designer Foods Symposium (May, 1994, in Washington, DC) researchers and experts came from all over the world to discuss the healing values of aged garlic extract, soy protein, licorice extract and flax.

At the symposium, aged garlic extract was reported to be rich in a particular phytochemical called S-allyl cysteine. Scientific studies show aged garlic extract:

1. fights circulatory and heart disease (the number one killer in the United States) by lowering blood pressure and cholesterol, decreasing blood clotting, and protecting against plaque formation;
2. is a potent antioxidant;
3. fights Alzheimer's disease (aged garlic extract appears to modulate serotonin levels indicating new brain activity and improved brain nutrition);
4. helps detoxify xenoestrogens (such as some pesticides), preventing promotion of tumor growth;
5. fights prostate cancer;
6. fights skin cancer;
7. fights breast cancer (using selenium and aged garlic extract, Dr. John Milner of Pennsylvania State University achieved approximately a 90 percent reduction in breast cancer tumors);
8. fights infections (aged garlic extract seems to have natural, anti-viral, antibiotic, and anti-inflammatory properties, e.g., against HIV-1 strains, herpes virus, and candida albicans);

Soy Protein

Phytochemicals of soy protein appear to lower blood cholesterol and to prevent cancer, especially breast and prostate cancer.

Licorice Root Extract

Many promising results of licorice root extract research were reported at the Designer Foods Symposium, including:

1. prevents tooth decay and gum disease;
2. an intensive sweetener without calories;
3. thought to be one of the best anti-inflammatories;
4. ulcer treatment (in Europe);
5. prevents breast cancer;
6. promising against HIV in Japanese human clinical trials.

Facts about Flax

In addition to aged garlic extract, licorice and soy, reports from 1994 Designer Food Symposium indicated that flax:

1. is high in lignans, which have anti-mitotic, anti-viral, antioxidant and anti-tumor effects;
2. appears to enhance estrogen ratios in a positive direction (in the liver);
3. contains phytochemicals, such as omega-3 fatty acids which seem to decrease "bad" carcinogenic estrogens which may encourage tumor growth;

Conclusion: Healing Hands, Healing Body

Chiropractors have used the benefits of phytochemicals for 100 years in the form of health-giving, enzymatically-active fresh fruits and vegetables. However, most of today's foods are high in pesticides, preservatives, and food additives. Only in recent years has the National Cancer Institute (and others) embarked on a major program to study and assess "designer foods."

In seeking homeostasis, diet must be an integral part of total health. In today's lifestyle, with its fast foods, empty carbohydrates and toxin laden food, designer foods, such as aged garlic extract, soy licorice extract, and flax seem an essential part of any successful chiropractic practice.

Truly, designer foods can be chiropractic's sleeping health giant.

Reference:

1. Mangelsdorf, M.E. and Bionchi, A., "Start-Ups: Designer Foods," Inc. Magazine, June 1994, p. 33.

Editor's Note: Dr. Cichoke is the author of over 250 articles and seven books, most recently *Enzymes and Enzyme Therapy: How to Jump Start Your Way to Lifelong Good Health* (Keats Publishing, Inc., New Canaan, CT).

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