

# YOUR HEART — HEALTHY AND HAPPY, NATURALLY

*To protect the heart and great vessels, above all take measures that are healthy for the heart and promote ojas, that cleanse the gaps and channels, and help create serenity of mind.*  
— the Charaka Samhita



Your beating heart is the quintessential indicator that you are alive. No other organ is more vital to sustaining your individual existence. It is therefore no wonder that coronary artery disease, the clogging of the arteries that causes heart attacks, is the most serious of all maladies. More than half of all the women alive now will die of heart disease.

As the number one killer of both men and women today, heart attacks and strokes account for more than twice as many deaths as all cancers put together. Yet, according to a recent Gallup poll, most women are largely unaware of their risk for heart disease. They tend to overrate the possibility of dying from breast cancer and underrate that of dying from heart disease. This misperception is probably due to the fact that before age fifty, twice as many men as women have heart disease, supporting the popular notion that heart disease is a man's disease. Also, until recently, most medical research was done on men, and the few studies that were done on women were not widely published.

In reality, however, heart disease claims more lives than the next sixteen causes of death combined, including breast cancer, lung cancer, and brain stroke. These statistics may sound shocking and indeed have been used to frighten women into taking hormone therapy for prevention. A better use for them is to motivate you to start exercising and eat a healthier diet, because the good news about heart disease is that nearly all of it is *preventable*, and much of it may be reversible.



## THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT LIFESTYLE

Recent research shows that we have considerable control over the destiny of our heart health. Findings from a study of over 84,000 women participants in the Nurses' Health Study, as reported in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, reveal that by simply following a healthy lifestyle, you can lower your heart attack risk by as much as 82 percent!

This extremely low risk of heart disease applied to all women in the study who did not smoke, exercised at least one half hour per day, maintained a normal body weight, and ate a healthy diet. Even more startling is that this lowered risk applied to women with these habits regardless of their age, their menopausal status, their family history of heart disease, and whether or not they had been diagnosed with high cholesterol or high blood pressure.

These findings are especially relevant today, with millions of women looking for new ways to reduce their heart attack risk since HT's purported heart benefits were discredited by the Women's Health Initiative. While we now know that HT *increases*, not decreases heart attacks and strokes, the benefits of healthy lifestyle remain for the taking!

It is worth noting that the reason women taking HT in earlier observational studies had less heart disease than women who didn't was due to their thinner bodies and healthier lifestyle. Their healthy habits reduced their heart disease risk by half in spite of their taking HT, which has been found to *increase* heart disease by approximately 25 percent. If they had simply followed their healthy lifestyles and left the hormones in the medicine cabinet, they would have been even better off!

More good news from the Nurse's Health Study is that if you already have high blood pressure or high cholesterol, or you are overweight, *it is not too late* to get moving and improve your diet. With even these simple lifestyle changes, you can quickly begin to enjoy a *dramatic* reduction in your heart disease risk, and begin feeling really great to boot!

## HT AND YOUR HEART: THE LATEST (ASTOUNDING!) RESEARCH

In the early 1990s, medical scientists and physicians were confident in estrogen's ability to reduce cardiovascular disease. When the Heart and Estrogen/Progesterone Replacement Study (HERS) trial was planned in the mid-1990s to test estrogen's effectiveness in women who had already had a heart attack, the study was strongly opposed as a waste of time and effort, because the benefits of estrogen on heart health were considered already known.



The results, published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in 1998, were some of the most surprising medical findings of the century. Within the first year of the trial, early results showed such a disproportionate *increase* in the number of heart attacks in the women taking HT versus those who didn't, that the trial was nearly stopped prematurely to prevent further injury.

The HERS trial clearly indicated that giving estrogen to a woman who has already had a heart attack does *not* reduce the incidence of a second one, and, in fact, can lead to an *increase* in heart attacks in the first year. A HERS follow-up study seven years later confirms the lack of any benefit of HT at all for women who have had heart attacks.

The surprising results of the HERS study were eclipsed in July 2002 by the findings of the Women's Health Initiative, a randomized, placebo-controlled "gold standard" study on HT, involving 27,000 mainly healthy women between the ages of 50 and 79. The world medical community was shocked in July 2002 to find not only the absence of a protective effect against heart disease, but an actual *increase* in heart attacks, strokes, and blood clots in women taking HT versus a placebo.

Today, the American Heart Association (AHA) recommends against giving HT for the prevention of cardiovascular disease, a 180-degree turn-around from prior decades!

The Women's Health Initiative and the studies mentioned earlier make my point clearly: Much of what we hear initially (and sometimes for many years) about the benefits of the latest drug or hormonal approach may eventually prove to be just plain wrong. In the history of modern medicine, a host of drugs and therapies have been pulled off the market due to harmful and serious side-effects discovered after the fact.

Fortunately, these recent studies have proven what our common sense should tell us. Heart health doesn't come from a pill, whether it is a drug, a hormone, or a vitamin. A healthy heart doesn't need added hormones. What we *really* need to do is get moving and eat right!

## TREATING HEART DISEASE NATURALLY

In contrast to the ineffective and harmful results of HT, research shows that certain non-drug treatments can actually reverse and prevent heart disease. One natural approach — using diet and lifestyle to reverse heart disease — has proven to be surprisingly effective and free of harmful side effects.



## The Ornish Study: Diet and Lifestyle Changes Work

In the 1980s, Dean Ornish, M.D., led a landmark study addressing the question “Can lifestyle changes reverse coronary heart disease?” In 1990, the results of that study were published in a major medical journal, the *Lancet*. These results documented the first attempt to reverse established heart disease through a comprehensive lifestyle program of diet, stress reduction, exercise, smoking cessation, and group support.

The results were astonishingly positive. After one year, the lifestyle group had measurably *reversed* the degree of blockage in their arteries, while the group undergoing “usual medical care” experienced increased blockages despite cholesterol-lowering drugs. The lifestyle group also had markedly less chest pain, while in the other group angina had worsened. Follow-up at five years found that the lifestyle group continued to improve. Chest pains and heart attacks were about 50 percent less in the lifestyle group, while the usual medical care group experienced a 27.7 percent worsening of their blockages. Overall, the positive changes in the lifestyle group translated into not only better numbers but less disease and a higher quality of life.

The success of Dr. Ornish’s program makes this choice clear: If you want to, you have the power to not only prevent heart disease but reverse it without drugs, HT, or surgery. The choice is yours. As you may remember, MAV identifies ages forty-five to fifty-five, the midlife transition years, as a critical decade for building the foundation of your future health. If you choose to follow a healthy lifestyle at this time, not only will you be easing your menopausal and midlife symptoms, but you will also be investing in good heart health for many decades.

Now let’s examine the cause of heart disease from the perspective of Maharishi Ayurveda. What does this ancient, profound health science offer us today in the way of prevention and treatment for women?

## ANCIENT VEDIC WISDOM FOR A HEALTHY HEART

*Those who eat heavy, cold, and excessively oily foods in excessive quantity and do excessive mental work, suffer from disease of the vessels that nourish the heart.*

— *the Charaka Samhita*

Thousands of years ago this classic Ayurvedic text identified the exact causes of heart disease as we know them today: eating too much fatty, rich food and suffering from chronic mental and emotional stress.

We are all too familiar with both of these factors in our modern Western lifestyles. Even our popular music testifies to our fast-food habits: “Eating dinner



from a paper sack — a 99-cent heart attack.” And it is no surprise to any of us that chronic mental and emotional stress can increase blood pressure and the risk of heart disease. Indeed, not “taking a break from it all” each year — skipping your annual vacation — can increase your risk of dying of a heart attack by as much as 32 percent, according to recent findings by University of Pittsburgh psychologist Karen Matthews and colleagues. More proof of the dangers of a lifestyle that is perpetually on the go!

In treating heart disease, MAV takes into consideration both diet and stress by recognizing that the human heart is actually two hearts: the physical heart muscle, which pumps our blood, and the emotional heart, which experiences love, joy, sadness, and every other human feeling. It says both of these hearts must be supported for health, the physical heart through diet and the emotional heart through stress reduction and enhancement of ojas, the bliss factor that keeps you immune to disease (see Chapter 5).

I will begin with the MAV treatments for the emotional heart, which emphasize reducing chronically stressful emotions, balancing your doshas, and enjoying the heart-healing effects of ojas-enhancing *rejuvenatives*. For healing your physical heart, I will present dietary and herbal approaches that help to clear toxic plaques (ama) from your arteries to give your heart full strength and stamina for its vital job of pumping blood through your body.

But first I want to introduce you to what MAV considers the most valuable approach for both emotional and physical heart health, the practice of the Transcendental Meditation technique.

## Transcendental Meditation for Your Heart

Remember Dr. Ornish’s program, the natural approach that worked so well to reverse heart disease? It is amazingly effective, but there’s a catch: Ornish’s program recommends that only 10 percent of total daily calories come from fat, whereas the average American eats a diet with *nearly four times* that much fat. While Ornish’s diet may be ideal for reversing coronary heart disease, and is certainly doable for the most motivated patients, such a dramatic change in diet is very difficult for most people to achieve.

Maharishi Ayurveda provides a simpler approach for reducing heart attacks and strokes naturally without requiring a dramatic dietary change. Transcendental Meditation, introduced to the world in 1955 by the famous Vedic sage from India, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, creates a state of “restful alertness” during two twenty-minute periods of meditation each day. Through the experience of this peaceful state of mind, Transcendental Meditation induces a beneficial mind-body chain reaction that leads ultimately to reduced atherosclerosis (arterial blockage), lower blood



pressure, and lower risk of death from heart attack, stroke, and even cancer. See Chapters 9 and 10 for more about this technique.

### *TM and Reversal of Heart Disease*

In April 2000, a remarkable result emerged from a National Institutes of Health (NIH)-funded study conducted by Robert Schneider, M. D., the director of the NIH-sponsored Center for Natural Medicine and Prevention at the Maharishi University of Management (MUM) in Fairfield, Iowa. Dr. Schneider looked at the effects of Transcendental Meditation in men and women with high blood pressure. He found that in less than nine months, the meditating individuals demonstrated a measurable reversal in the degree of blockage in their carotid arteries (the main arteries leading to the brain). A control group, who received health education but did not do Transcendental Meditation, showed an increase in arterial blockage.

These results caught the attention of media and experts alike because no stress-reduction technique alone had ever before been demonstrated to reverse arterial blockage. The success of Transcendental Meditation suggested the possibility of a “mind over matter” effect that was intriguing and, before this study, barely imaginable. To show that simply sitting comfortably with eyes closed for twenty minutes twice a day could lead to physical changes in the amount of plaque in the arteries was revolutionary for modern medicine. Further studies in larger numbers of people are now under way to investigate this healthful phenomenon further.

### *Transcendental Meditation and Your Blood Pressure*

High blood pressure, or hypertension, is one of the leading risk factors for heart attacks. Some experts consider it an indication that blockage of the arteries is already present. Unfortunately, nearly half of all women over fifty-five have hypertension; by age sixty-five, that proportion rises to 60 percent. Controlling high blood pressure helps to lower risk of heart attack and stroke by about 30 percent, but to do this, most patients need to be on blood pressure medication for life.

There is some good news about hypertension, however, if you want to avoid or reduce your dependence on medication. Studies indicate that Transcendental Meditation effectively lowers blood pressure roughly as much as taking a blood pressure medication: by about ten points systolic and six points diastolic. A groundbreaking study published in the American Heart Association’s journal *Hypertension* in 1995 found that Transcendental Meditation was *twice as effective* at lowering high blood pressure as other relaxation techniques.



## *Transcendental Meditation and Other Diseases*

Transcendental Meditation is good not only for your heart but for disease prevention in general. In a study reported at the Society of Behavioral Medicine's annual meeting in 1999, the risks of heart attack and stroke were found to be reduced by almost 50 percent in Transcendental Meditation practitioners as compared to control subjects. Even more remarkably, the number of deaths due to cancer and all other causes was also reduced by nearly 50 percent in the Transcendental Meditation subjects, in the randomized trials completed thus far.

This fascinating result tells us that the beneficial heart effects of the Transcendental Meditation technique are not due merely to its lowering blood pressure or some other single factor. Rather, according to Maharishi Ayurveda, the practice of the Transcendental Meditation technique strengthens the body's inner intelligence in a holistic and integrated way, leading to healthier, *more balanced* functioning not only in the cardiovascular system but in the immune system, central nervous system, and probably other systems of the body as well.

## *Transcendental Meditation Compared to HT*

Table 7.1 compares the dramatic spectrum of improvements in physical health Transcendental Meditation yields to the limited, and often harmful, effects of HT. The evidence clearly indicates that Transcendental Meditation is far more beneficial, as well as safer, than HT.

### *A Warning Note*

I don't advise you to throw out your high blood pressure pills as you rush out to the nearest center teaching the Transcendental Meditation technique! Do learn the technique, but ask your doctor about the possibility of reducing your medication as you begin to accrue the benefits of your daily practice. (See the Resources for places where you can learn Transcendental Meditation.)

## HEALING YOUR EMOTIONAL HEART WITH MAV

*One who wants to protect the heart, the great vessels and the ojas, should avoid particularly the causes due to affliction of the mind.*

— *the Charaka Samhita*

MAV long ago described the intimate connection between your emotional life and the health of your heart. According to MAV, your heart is not only a physical organ that circulates your blood but, like your brain, a seat of consciousness in the body.



*Table 7-1: Comparing the Effectiveness of HT to Transcendental Meditation For Heart Health*

Condition	HT	Transcendental Meditation
Hypertension (HBP)	0 % effective	Equivalent to taking a medication
Atherosclerosis	0 % percent effective	Reverses blockage
Heart Attack	Increases risk	50% reduced risk of death by heart attack
Stroke	Increases risk	50% reduced risk of death by stroke
Cancer risk	Increased breast and ovarian cancer risk	Cancer deaths reduced by 50%

Modern mind-body medicine, or psychoneuroimmunology (PNI), acknowledges that your brain and your heart speak the same language. Neurotransmitters, the chemicals your brain secretes in response to your ever-changing mental and emotional experiences, are simultaneously “understood” by your mind and “felt” in your heart. Candace Pert, Ph.D., a leading pioneer in PNI research, explains that it’s as if both heart and brain were listening to the same conversation, with one organ reacting more intellectually and the other more emotionally.

These neurochemical conversations are seldom trivial. On the contrary, PNI research has shown that positive, uplifting thoughts and feelings can be good for your cardiovascular system by reducing *cortisol*, the stress hormone, thus lowering blood pressure, and increasing *serotonin*, the “well-being” brain chemical. On the other hand, “heart-hurtful” conversations can raise cortisol and trigger the fight-or-flight response, promoting heart disease via elevated blood pressure, elevated cholesterol, impaired immune function, and damage to the lining of the arteries.

## OJAS AND YOUR HEART

*Life known by sensory experience is located in the heart. It is also the seat of the essential ojas and reservoir of consciousness.*

— the Charaka Samhita

In MAV, the heart is seen as the seat of ojas in your body. Ojas, you may recall from Chapter 5, is the finest, most subtle level of your physical body, so subtle that it is described as being as much consciousness as it is matter. Ojas is experienced as



bliss: a pleasant, satisfying, soothing inner state of perfectly balanced mind, emotions, and physiology. Ojas is like a lamp in a doorway, lighting both inside and outside. In one stroke, ojas both infuses your mind with bliss and enlivens the healing intelligence of the physical body.

According to Ayurvedic wisdom, your life depends on the maintenance of a critical store of eight precious drops of ojas that reside in your heart. These eight drops are essential to life and to maintaining the connection between the soul and the body. They must be perfectly preserved in their wholeness since, according to the ancient texts, any diminution (even a tiny amount) results in the end of life.

Mental and emotional well-being plays an enormous role in preserving the eight essential drops of ojas in your heart. Positive inner experiences enhance ojas; negative emotions destroy ojas. Many a wife has implored her irate husband, “Calm down, honey, before you have a heart attack!” Such urgings are scientifically validated by studies that show a person is twice as likely to have a heart attack within two hours after an episode of sudden, intense anger as at other times.

For women with heart disease, another issue is stress in the marital relationship. How happy or unhappy you are in your marriage has been shown to affect recurrent heart problems. Increased marital stress contributes to more heart attacks, the need for further heart-related surgery, and heart-related deaths.

The *Charaka Samhita* says the positive qualities of the mind and emotions, such as inner calmness, positive thinking, happiness, and feelings of love and compassion, uphold ojas and lessen the risk of heart disease and all illnesses. It’s beginning to appear that “Don’t worry, be happy” is as important a prescription for heart health as exercising and eating a healthful diet!

## Balancing Yourself to Enhance Ojas

You may recall from Chapter 3 that dosha imbalances are related to specific types of emotional symptoms. Each dosha can potentially damage your critical supply of ojas through the negative emotions it may cause. Worry, grief, and fear can dry up your naturally unctuous store of essential ojas through the effects of imbalanced vata. The searing flames of heated emotions such as anger and resentment can burn ojas through the action of imbalanced pitta. And deep, chronic sadness can create a heavy-heartedness that damages your ojas through the effects of sluggish, imbalanced kapha.

Each of these emotional conditions is rooted in an imbalance at a subsidiary level of dosha functioning, or subdosha. Three of these subdoshas, *prana vata*, *vyana vata*, and *sadbaka pitta*, all have dual residences in the heart and in the brain. In other words, action in the brain equals action in the heart, or biochemistry in the brain equals biochemistry in the heart. A passing thought, a fleeting emotion, a deep state of lasting grief are all felt in your heart as they are experienced in your mind and



consciousness. Negative emotions like chronic anxiety, depression, anger, and hostility have all been repeatedly demonstrated to dramatically increase your risk of heart disease. Therefore, stressful emotions can create dosha imbalances and damage your heart, and vice versa.

Physical influences such as the wrong food, poor sleep, late nights, missed or delayed meals, heart surgery, and toxins like alcohol, drugs, and cigarettes can all cause imbalances in your emotional subdoshas. Indeed, depression is especially common after heart surgery and heart attacks and is commonplace in people suffering from addictions. Over time, all of these emotional imbalances can affect the health of your physical heart if they are not resolved. Keeping your doshas balanced and maintaining a healthy mental and emotional state are critical to nourishing your ojas and living a long, blissful, heart-healthy life. (See Chapter 10 for details on overcoming your emotional imbalances naturally.)

## Using Rejuvenatives to Enhance Ojas

In Ayurvedic terms, ojas can be enhanced by *rasayanas* (ruh-sah-yuh-nuhz) or *rejuvenatives*, which refer to anything that causes ojas to be produced throughout the physiology. Rejuvenatives can be physical, in the form of herbal preparations, or behavioral, in the form of attitudes and behaviors. They operate at the deepest level of physiology, between intelligence and matter, consciousness and the body. There they nourish and uphold the fundamental health of the body by supporting and enhancing ojas, which unifies all aspects of the body into a seamless, harmonious whole.

Research over the past twenty years has revealed that many of the traditional MAV rasayana herbal formulations are especially rich in antioxidants, those important chemicals your body needs to fight off free radicals that cause damaging oxidation in your cells. In fact, several formulations are hundreds of times more powerful than the well-known antioxidants vitamin C and E. Like whole foods, these formulas contain a large variety of antioxidant components that counteract free radicals through many counterbalancing mechanisms (unlike high doses of one isolated vitamin or other substance, which could bring side effects) while at the same time supporting the body's own antioxidant defense system.

One of the most ancient and highly prized herbal rejuvenatives, formulated according to strict traditional guidelines, is produced today under the trade name Maharishi Amrit Kalash (MAK). Amrit Kalash (Ahm-rit Kuh-lahsh), or Amrit, literally means “immortality,” and indeed its traditional purpose is the promotion of health and longevity.

Dozens of research studies have been performed on Amrit, showing a wide variety of benefits, including anti-inflammatory and anticancer effects, antioxidant effects that are a thousand times greater than those of vitamin C or E, cardiovascular



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## *Problems with Antioxidant Supplements*

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Many of my patients are taking antioxidant vitamins and herbal extracts in hopes of avoiding heart disease in the future. It's true that people who eat diets rich in antioxidant vitamins have less heart disease, according to a number of studies. However, studies in which antioxidant supplements are given to people in randomized, placebo-controlled clinical trials (recall, that's the gold standard) have not yielded the same positive results. In fact, in some instances, such supplements have done more harm than good.

In two separate trials published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in the mid 1990s, a group who took beta carotene actually had *more* deaths from both heart disease and lung cancer than a control group who took no supplements. Vitamin E also showed negative results in one of these trials, although other studies on vitamin E are mixed; a number of them show some benefit for reducing heart attacks and some show no difference. Unfortunately, for those who are looking for a shortcut to heart health that skips diet, exercise, and stress reduction, antioxidant supplements have not yet stood up to the test.

What *has* been especially effective at lowering heart disease risk is a healthy diet that is naturally rich in antioxidants. Recall the Iowa Women's Health Study, discussed in Chapter 1, which found that women with the highest vitamin E consumption from *food* had the lowest risk of death from heart disease. However, remarkably, this effect was stronger in those women who did not take vitamin supplements than in those who did.

These findings are completely in line with what we might expect given the principles of MAV. A wholesome diet rich in antioxidant foods and spices according to Nature's design naturally supports the inner balance that our bodies are striving to uphold. On the other hand, taking large amounts of single isolated nutrients is likely to throw off the body's intricate web of nutrient and biochemical interactions and generally should be avoided.

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benefits, and protection against the side effects of chemotherapy treatments without reducing their efficacy.

In heart patients, Amrit has been shown to reduce chest pains and levels of oxidized low-density lipoprotein (LDL), an especially toxic, artery-damaging form of this “bad” cholesterol, indicating a possible reversal of the disease process. These early studies have been so promising that the National Institutes of Health is currently funding a placebo-controlled, double-blind trial of Amrit versus a vitamin C and E “cocktail” to see if it improves the health of individuals with heart disease.

## *Supporting Your Ojas through Behavioral Rejuvenatives*

Not all Rejuvenatives are herbal preparations. Some prescriptions are simple daily activities. The Vedic tradition tells of a king who was interviewing a group of vaidyas for the position of royal physician. One of his test questions was: “What is the simplest rasayana available to the common man, of no material cost, that is both relaxing and invigorating and is available every day to everyone?” The correct answer was “A morning walk.” Not only is an early morning walk in the fresh air invigorating, but it clears out any morning brain fog and creates a positive mood for the whole day — a side benefit for our emotional hearts!




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### *Six Ojas-Enhancing, Heart-Healthy Tips*

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- Turn your attention to that which brings you bliss and upliftment. Do not dwell on thoughts or issues that evoke negative emotions like anger, resentment, worry, fear, sadness, or grief.
  - Eat a wholesome, fresh, and delicious diet that includes moderate amounts of pure, organic oils such as olive oil. Too little nourishment, a fat-free diet, and too much raw, rough, and dry food deplete ojas.
  - Avoid drugs, alcohol in excess (Ayurveda advises none on a regular basis), cigarettes, unnatural foods (such as genetically modified ones), and exposure to environmental toxins.
  - Learn the Transcendental Meditation technique and practice it regularly.
  - Get enough sleep and avoid staying up late into the night.
  - Stay active. Get at least thirty minutes of walking or other exercise each day. A morning walk in the rising sun is particularly ojas-enhancing.
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## HEALING YOUR PHYSICAL HEART WITH MAV

Enhancing ojas is the key to the health of your dual hearts, the emotional heart directly and the physical heart indirectly. However, the buildup of cholesterol and other artery-damaging substances in your blood and in your arteries may require some extra attention.

According to MAV, cholesterol buildup happens when you overwhelm your digestive tract with rich, fatty foods on a regular basis and cannot digest and metabolize them fully. The resulting accumulation of ama, as elevated cholesterol, triglycerides, and other artery-harming toxins, is the root physical cause of heart disease. Specifically, the Ayurvedic texts describe how ama builds up in the blood plasma (*rasa dhatu*) and from there damages the arteries carrying blood and oxygen (*rasa vaha srotas*) to the heart.

Modern medicine is recognizing that elevated cholesterol alone does not fully explain heart attacks. The role of internal toxins in heart disease is gaining recognition. Such toxins include free radicals; overactive immune cells creating inflammation, measured by “c-reactive protein”; homocysteine buildup due to a lack of folic acid and other vitamins; trans-fatty acids from impure oils in your diet; and environmental toxins, such as mercury from contaminated fish.

From the perspective of Ayurveda, these highly reactive toxins interact with ama, forming an especially vicious form of unstable, irritating ama called *ama visha*, which can directly damage the arteries. One example of this is LDL, which is not truly “bad” cholesterol until it is attacked by free radicals. Only then is it taken up by immune cells in the artery wall, beginning the process of plaque formation, which



gradually blocks the passage of blood. The insidious process all too often culminates in inflammation, the body's response to irritating ama visha, increasing the likelihood of the plaque becoming unstable and rupturing, causing a heart attack. The rasayana MAK discussed earlier, as well as Maharishi Rejuvenation Treatment, have both been shown to lower levels of toxic oxidized fats in the blood, and may possibly lower the risk of heart disease.

After menopause, toxic ama buildup can lead to any number of heart health risks. Fortunately, most of my patients have responded well to dietary and lifestyle changes, often dropping their cholesterol by 50 points or more within a few weeks. The experience of my patient Margaret shows how improving digestion and metabolism can reverse cardiovascular ama buildup, lower cholesterol and lower heart attack risk.

### *Margaret's Story: Clearing Ama to Lower Cholesterol*

Margaret, a fifty-three-year-old financial advisor, first came to see me after her annual checkup with her internist. She had learned at that her cholesterol was significantly elevated, and she was concerned about going on medication to lower it.

Margaret pulled out her lab report for my review. It showed her total cholesterol was 316, far above the desired level of 200 or less. Her good cholesterol (high-density lipoprotein, or HDL) was only mediocre, yet her bad cholesterol (LDL) was very elevated at 212 (normal is below 130).

Not surprisingly, Margaret's pulse showed a lot of ama. I assured her that if she was committed to making some lifestyle changes and would follow a careful dietary and herbal program for a few months, she could avoid what she feared would be a “downward spiral of more and more medication” as she got older.

Based on her evaluation, I advised Margaret to follow the diet prescribed for her particular dosha imbalance — a kapha-balancing diet — and the healing meal plan outlined in Chapter 4. I also asked her to completely avoid processed, refined, and restaurant foods, and to cook for herself with pure, wholesome, and fresh ingredients. I assured Margaret that her cravings for sugar, chocolate, and other unwholesome foods would resolve within a few days of sticking to the diet and she would soon find the program rewarding and satisfying.

Six weeks later Margaret returned with her latest report work in hand. Her total cholesterol had dropped nearly 50 points and was now 267, better than a 15 percent decrease in just a few weeks. Most of the decrease was in the bad cholesterol, now down to 174. This result was as good as might be expected with medication and translated into a 26 percent drop in her risk of heart disease.

Margaret continued her diet, along with a moderate exercise program, and after six months her cholesterol profile was nearly normal. On a follow-up visit, she told me: “I don't really mind not eating snacks any more, because I no longer have cravings like I used to. I've even lost a few pounds and am very happy with the way I feel — much lighter. And I have lots of energy again!”



## Lower Your Cholesterol the Natural Way

If your cholesterol is as high as Margaret's was, you will obtain the best results by following the intensive program outlined below. However, if your cholesterol is only mildly elevated (between 200 and 240), you may not need to follow as strict of a program as Margaret's. Simpler dietary changes, such as reducing fat intake, can lower cholesterol effectively in most people. But remember, cholesterol is only one side of the coin. *Ama visha*, toxins and free radicals that join with cholesterol to narrow your artery walls, also increase the risk of a heart attack. A primarily vegetarian diet of fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains and legumes, and nonfat organic dairy products will provide you with heart-protecting, cancer-preventing nutrition that delivers much more benefit than a simple low-fat diet can provide.

Making a few simple dietary changes can go a long way toward lowering your cholesterol. Increase your intake of fresh fruits and vegetables, whole cooked grains, legumes, and nuts and seeds. Eat less meat, cheese, and restaurant and packaged food. Limit your fat intake exclusively (or nearly) to small amounts of pure organic olive oil. And don't forget to exercise daily for at least thirty minutes — even a walk will do. Exercise also enhances your *agni*, your ability to digest your food well and metabolize *ama* out of your body.

If you have the time and desire for a total makeover of your diet, I encourage you to try a more intense, individually tailored program for quicker results. Study the guidelines that follow to design your own cholesterol-conquering program without drugs or hormones.

## General Guidelines for Lowering Cholesterol

First of all, follow the “Eat Your Way to Balance: Kapha” diet and the “Healing Meal Plan for All Imbalances,” both in Chapter 4. Avoid processed and packaged foods, fried foods, restaurant meals, and foods containing saturated, hydrogenated, or trans fats (especially margarine and the partially hydrogenated oils found in packaged foods and baked goods). All of these can elevate cholesterol and lead to the formation of free-radical cholesterol complexes, a particularly dangerous plaque-promoting type of cholesterol.

### *Dietary Tips for Lowering Your Cholesterol*

The following recommendations will optimize digestion and help clear *ama* from your *rasa dhatu* and *meda dhatu* (plasma and fat tissues) for better metabolism — and lower levels of fats and cholesterol.



- Drink your herbal water daily as instructed in Chapter 6 and be sure to include the spices and herbs recommended for balancing meda, which governs your fat metabolism.
- Set a regular schedule of mealtimes and stick to it.
- Don't eat between meals except for fresh fruit or other healthful snacks, if you really feel genuine hunger.
- Eat until you are satisfied, not stuffed, and eat slowly. When you dine out, bring a bag of your favorite herbal tea to enjoy at the end of the meal instead of going back for seconds before what you've already eaten "hits bottom." This will help you avoid overeating.
- Drink a half cup of warm water before the meal and sip more warm water throughout the meal.
- Eat proportionately more vegetables and legumes (including soy) than other food types, such as breads, dairy, and meats.
- If you are not having hot flashes, you may include fresh garlic in your daily diet. (Garlic is "heating" according to MAV and could trigger more flashes.) Sauté one crushed garlic clove in a little olive oil. Mix into your vegetables, soup, or grains. (While studies have not shown garlic extracts or powders to be effective at lowering cholesterol, MAV describes many beneficial effects of fresh garlic on the heart and blood vessels and recommends it, especially for people with vata- and kapha-related problems.)

### *Emissaries of Heart Health: Three Special Ayurvedic Herbs*

All MAV herbal preparations contain a balanced combination of herbs, spices, and other substances to avoid negative effects. Formulas for a particular purpose are designed around specific herbs that are known to be outstanding in their healing effects on that condition. *Arjuna myrabolans* and *ashwagandha* are two such gems in the Ayurvedic treasury of herbs for heart health. Their purposes and effects are described briefly here, along with those of another Ayurvedic superstar, *guggulu*, a tree resin with a remarkable ability to lower cholesterol. (For information on obtaining balanced MAV formulas containing these heart-healthy herbs, see the Resources.)



**Arjuna myrabolans (*Terminalia arjuna*).** Arjuna is the best herb overall for the heart, according to the Ayurvedic texts. It is named after Arjuna, the warrior hero of the classical Indian *Mahabharata*, who in the story of the *Bhagavad-Gita* was emotionally torn between his duty to fight for righteousness and his loyalty to family members whom he would have to kill in battle. Like Arjuna, you can get caught between two opposing desires, a situation that is deeply disturbing to sadhaka pitta, the subdosha governing your emotional heart. Such stress can evoke in your body a toxic biochemical state that raises the “heart-wrenching” hormones cortisol and adrenaline.

Arjuna myrabolans calms and soothes sadhaka pitta, easing emotional stress and reducing levels of heart-damaging hormones, according to scientific studies. It is useful for nearly any type of heart disease because it supports both the physical and emotional hearts.

**Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*)** This powerful rejuvenating herb for the heart and the whole body helps any condition of weakness, whether due to illness, stress, lack of sleep, overwork, or advanced age. It is included in many preparations for heart problems due to its ability to reduce stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline, improve immune function, and promote good sleep, an important factor in heart health. (*Somniference* means sleep in Latin.)

**Guggulu (*Commiphora mukul*).** Guggulu is a gum resin and a relative of the Biblical botanical spice myrrh. Guggulu is combined with a variety of other herbs to make specific formulas for different health problems, including high cholesterol, arthritis, and other inflammatory conditions; uterine fibroids; and thyroid nodules. In one study, treatment with guggulu reduced total cholesterol by 22 percent while increasing good cholesterol by 35 percent. A word of caution, however: Do not take guggulu “straight.” If not properly formulated in combination with cooling and balancing herbs, or if taken inappropriately, guggulu may cause heartburn and other pitta-related symptoms.

### *Dietary Tips that Nourish Your Heart*

The following tips include specific foods and spices described in the Ayurvedic texts as *hridayam* (hrih dyuhm), meaning “directly nourishing and supporting heart health.” (*Hridaya* is the Sanskrit word for heart.)

- Squeeze a wedge of fresh lemon or lime on your food just before serving.
- Add a few sprinkles of freshly ground black pepper to your meal.



- Use freshly ground cardamom (or the whole pod or seeds as you prefer) daily as desired in your cooked cereal, cooked vegetables, tea, and the like.
- Include fresh pineapple in your diet.
- Eat some unsalted blanched almonds or walnuts every day. (Recommended in Ayurveda for thousands of years, nut consumption has recently been found to be associated with a dramatic reduction in heart disease risk. It also provides a rich, vegetarian source of omega-3 fatty acids, which are very good for the heart.)
- Start your breakfast each day with a stewed apple or pear. This supports ojas, immunity, elimination, digestion, metabolism, and balanced emotions. (See the recipe for nourishing stewed apple in Chapter 4 under “The Pitta Cleanse.”)
- If you are prone to high blood pressure, avoid herbal mixtures, foods, and teas that contain licorice root, unless it has been deglycyrrhizinated, a process that removes any blood-pressure-increasing components. Licorice root can increase sodium and fluid retention, especially in women.

## Maharishi Rejuvenation Treatment: Deeper Cleansing for Deep-Rooted Problems

Both MAV and modern medicine agree that diet and exercise are essential for normalizing cholesterol and promoting heart health. However, if symptoms are stubborn or a problem is deep-rooted, MAV recommends an aggressive “roto-rooter” technique for clearing ama, provided by a series of purification treatments known as *panchakarma* in the classical prescriptions and as Maharishi Rejuvenation Treatment (MRT) in MAV (see Chapter 6).

Maharishi Rejuvenation Treatment is a series of gentle but deep cleansing procedures that systematically dissolve ama, mobilize it out of your tissues, and promote its removal through your digestive tract. If you have a stubborn case of high cholesterol that does not respond as quickly as you’d like to your lifestyle changes, or you would like to jump-start your metabolism as you work to establish better dietary and lifestyle habits, then a week of in-residence MRT may be just what you need. (See the Resources for MAV treatment centers.)

MRT has proven itself on the testing fields of modern medicine. A study performed by Hari Sharma, M.D., and colleagues of Ohio State University showed a sudden drop in total cholesterol during and immediately following the treatment. MRT also increased HDL cholesterol (which helps clear excess cholesterol from the body) by 7.5 percent within three months after subjects completed a three- to five-day treatment program. MRT also lowered lipid peroxide, a measure of toxic, oxidized fat



in the body. Research by Fagan and Herron shows that levels of pesticide, another potent category of toxins that may increase heart disease as well as cancer, are reduced by half in as little as five days of MRT.

These findings are all compatible with the MAV prediction that Maharishi Rejuvenation Treatment brings about a mobilization of ama and toxic wastes out of the body. They suggest that MRT may be very helpful as part of a comprehensive program to lower your cholesterol and heart disease risks and improve your overall health naturally.

## ADOPTING A HEART-HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

A wealth of information on heart health has been presented in this chapter. Nearly all of it relies on you to carry it out. In case you are not yet following any of the recommended lifestyle habits, I offer the following suggestions to help you adopt a heart-healthy lifestyle:

- Start by trying to establish *one* new heart-healthy habit. Pick the one that you have wanted to try for a long time but have never gotten around to, or one that sounded fun or inspired you in some way. For example, perhaps you have been meaning to exercise for a long time and an energizing morning walk sounds inviting. Give it a try!
- Once a new habit is second nature to you, add another heart-healthy habit of your choosing. Perhaps this time it will be eating a lighter evening meal, with lots of vegetables and a cholesterol-lowering lentil soup, complete with the heart-healthy, antioxidant spices turmeric and fresh garlic. Continue gradually adding the recommended habits until you are reaping the benefits
- At any time, learn Transcendental Meditation to reduce your mental stress and directly lower your risk of heart disease. It's effortless to practice and so easy that anyone who can think a thought can do Transcendental Meditation.
- If you find it difficult to change your habits on your own, or you feel you are a tough case with lots of ama, or you just want to get a jump-start to better health, take a week of in-residence Maharishi Rejuvenation Treatment. You will make a quantum leap toward better health, inner calm, and new lifestyle habits for making vibrant health your reality.