



A Chocolate Cure for Inflammation?

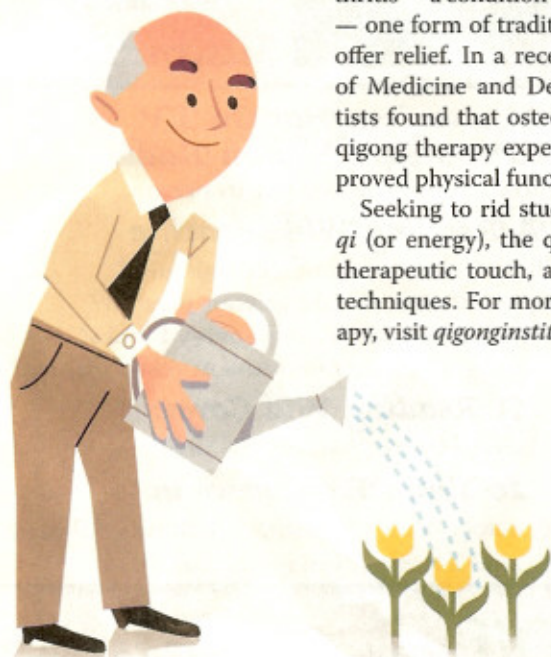
A small square of dark chocolate a day might not quash your cravings, but it could help shield you from heart disease, a new study from the *Journal of Nutrition* suggests. Sizing up data on 4,849 healthy adults, researchers found those who regularly ate modest amounts of dark chocolate had 17 percent lower blood levels of C-reactive protein (a marker of inflammation). That reduction might be significant enough to slash heart disease risk by a third in women and a fourth in men, according to the study's authors.

Dark chocolate is rich in potent antioxidants that may help fight inflammation, which is considered a major risk factor for heart disease (as well as cancer and diabetes). To make the most of the sweet stuff's heart-protecting effects, the study's authors recommend eating 6.7 grams a day (or about half a chocolate bar each week).

Qigong for Arthritis Relief

For the 21 million Americans who suffer osteoarthritis — a condition caused by cartilage breakdown — one form of traditional Chinese medicine could offer relief. In a recent study from the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, scientists found that osteoarthritis patients undergoing qigong therapy experienced reduced pain and improved physical functioning.

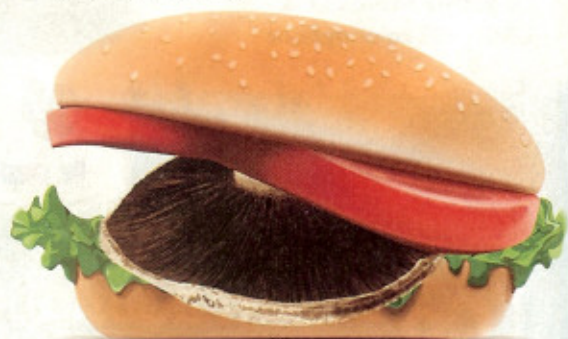
Seeking to rid study members of any unhealthy *qi* (or energy), the qigong practitioners turned to therapeutic touch, acupressure and other healing techniques. For more information about the therapy, visit qigonginstitute.org.



Pass the Portobello

Choosing mushrooms over meat could go a long way in cutting your calorie intake, according to new research from the Johns Hopkins Weight Management Center. For four days, study members ate lunch entrees loaded with meat (such as lasagna and sloppy Joes), then switched to mushroom-based meals the following week. Even though the meat-heavy lunches were far heartier — containing 420 more calories and 30 more fat grams per meal — study results showed participants “seemed to accept mushrooms as a palatable and suitable culinary substitute,” notes study author Lawrence Cheskin. What’s more, the study members didn’t make up for the lower-calorie mushroom dishes by eating more food later in the day.

Past research shows that, by swapping hamburgers for Portobello mushrooms for a year, men could save more than 18,000 calories and 3,000 grams of fat. In addition to providing a less fattening alternative to meat, mushrooms also deliver B vitamins, vitamin D and the antioxidant selenium.



C'mon, Get Happy

When it comes to living long, happiness may be as powerful as abstaining from smoking. Analyzing 30 studies on health and happiness, a research team from Rotterdam's Erasmus University discovered that — although it may not increase longevity among the seriously ill — happiness can substantially lengthen the lives of healthy people.

— ELIZABETH BARKER