

# Cutting Cholesterol in Kalamazoo

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*Bypass Surgery. Angioplasty. Drugs. There's got to be a better way to prevent and treat heart disease, diabetes and other diet-related diseases.*



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## Culturally-promoted Diseases

As a society, we do little to encourage people to stay healthy by eating a good diet and exercising. The typical effort—ineffective lessons in schools, occasional public-service messages on television and random newspaper articles or TV shows—pales in comparison to the billions of dollars that makers of junk food, alcohol and tobacco spend every year to push lifestyles that cause disease. Our mechanized, TV-saturated, information-age culture keeps people in the recliner, desk chair, or car, where their muscles and metabolism crumble.

## Hope

But we needn't throw in the towel. Education can have a real impact, as at least three programs have demonstrated:

**CSPI.** The Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) has sponsored campaigns to encourage entire communities to drink lower fat milk. With hard-hitting paid radio and TV spots urging people to “switch to 1% or less,” the market share of low-fat or fat-free milk has as much as doubled in towns like Clarksburg and Wheeling, West Virginia. And the changes were still evident a year later.

**Pritikin/Ornish.** Once people develop severe heart disease, surgery has been the norm. But first Nathan Pritikin, and then Dean Ornish, have proved that lentils can be as effective as surgery. Residential treatment centers runs by Ornish and others have shown that people with advanced coronary disease (and diabetes, obesity or hypertension) are willing to make radical changes in diet

and exercise that can eliminate the need for surgery and many drugs, even if it costs thousands of dollars a month.

**CHIP.** The California-based “lifestyle interventionist” Hans Diehl, has helped people avoid diet-related diseases by sponsoring special educational programs in cities like Rockford, IL; Kalamazoo, MI; and more than 120 cities in North America. Several hundred people at a time attend a four-week, 40-hour intensive education program on eating, cooking, shopping and exercising. On average, men lose eight pounds and women lose six pounds. Participants with high blood pressure problems record average falls

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of 8%, and LDL (bad) cholesterol levels initially above 130 mg% drop, on the average, 19% in men and 11% in women.

**Conclusion**

Ornish, Diehl and CSPI have shown that if the right message is delivered, people will respond. I know how important it is to deal with bio-terrorism, but we also need to prod the government to make a major investment in diet and exercise campaigns.

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*This editorial appeared in the Jan/Feb 2002 issue of Nutrition Action, the official publication of the Washington, DC-headquartered Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI). With over one million readers, this publication is one of the most read nutrition magazines in the world. Dr. Michael Jacobson has been the founder and executive director of CSPI since its inception as a consumer protective organization for more than 30 years.*

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