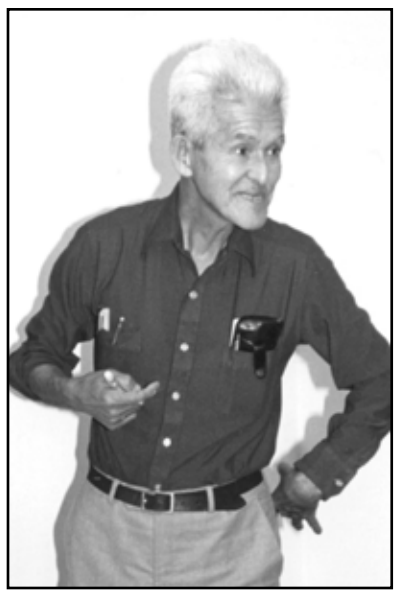
Arthritis, Kidney Function, and Salt Baths

Herman Aihara
Introduction by Bob Ligon

Herman Aihara developed the theory of acid and alkaline in response to a question that he had about George Ohsawa's thoughts on acid and alkaline. Basing his thinking on the elements present in foods such as sodium, calcium, phosphorus, and sulfur, Ohsawa designated acid foods as yin and alkaline foods as yang. Herman investigated this idea and distinguished the meaning of acid, acid foods, and acid-forming foods, and alkaline, alkaline foods, and alkaline-forming foods. The acid- or alkaline-forming quality of a food is the new effect (either acid or alkaline) of a food after it has been digested and assimilated. Herman agreed with Ohsawa that acid and acid foods are yin, and alkaline and alkaline foods are yang. However, Herman discovered that acid-forming foods could also be either yin or yang (see Acid and Alkaline, *Herman Aihara, G.O.M.F., 1986 for more details). Many of the most common foods, both yin and yang, in the American and European diet, i.e., meat, eggs (both yang foods), dairy, sweets, and all drugs (yin foods or substances), are considered acid forming. These foods, according to acid/alkaline theory, are taxing and eventually weakening to the kidneys. The prevalence of these foods, along with other factors, contributes to a condition of weak kidneys. Such has been Herman's observation from many years of consultation experience. The following is a letter Herman received from a woman with a deteriorating bone condition. Herman offers his opinion on how to approach this condition, including specific suggestions on how to strengthen the kidneys. And addressing a frequently asked question about one of those suggestions, Herman explains why he recommends salt baths.*



HERMAN AIHARA

Dear Mr. Aihara,

I am writing to you with the hope that you can find time in your busy schedule to advise me. I realize that you must receive many letters from people who are looking for help, and I would be grateful if only to hear from you that I must, after all, find the answers to my questions by myself.

Thirteen years ago I dislocated my hip very badly. Eight years ago I was introduced to the macrobiotic diet and have since been inconsistently following it (I do not eat meat, but continuously switch between a macrobiotic diet and one that includes unhealthy items.)

I began to limp (only slightly at first) about four years ago. I started to go to a body worker but finally went to see a couple of orthopedic specialists a few months ago when I wasn't improving. The x-rays showed that I have no cartilage at all in my left hip joint. Both doctors commented that I must have a high pain tolerance to still be walking, since my condition is at the end stage. I am sure that my macrobiotic diet (albeit partial) has contributed to my well-being.

One surgeon said he would prescribe pain pills if I found the discom-

fort too great, and that eventually I will have to have a total hip replacement. The surgeon recommended a hip replacement now since the bones are grinding together, my leg muscles are shortening, and I will begin to have back and knee problems before too long. Since I am 32 years old, this would mean a second replacement later in life when the first one wears out.

They say that cartilage cannot replace itself. My diagnosis is post-traumatic degenerative arthritis. Was Mr. Ohsawa referring only to rheumatoid and osteoarthritis when he said it is easily cured with Diet Number 7? Are you aware of any macrobiotic followers who have internal prostheses? Are there any special dietary considerations for them?

Because my activities (even standing or walking) have begun to be severely limited of late, I am considering a total hip replacement. There are many risks, including bone infection. I would be very grateful for an opinion from a macrobiotic perspective.

Thank you for all the knowledge and inspiration you have given me, and thank you for reading this.

– K.B.
Belmont, California

Dear K.B.,

I have just read your sad but not so mad letter. I admire your innocent but enduring character. It is difficult to give advice without knowing more about your condition, but I will try.

First, according to my understanding, cartilage grows and becomes bone every day (except teeth). In other words, bone is the final development of cartilage. However, since your cartilage is almost completely gone, your condition may take a long time to cure. Ohsawa's suggestion that Diet Number 7 can relieve arthritis would likely apply to your condition. However, to change your condition will take time. (Note: Ohsawa's suggestion did not consider the length of time needed to change health conditions, because his meaning of change means, "leading to change.")

Second, my advice is to follow macrobiotic dietary principles for at least six months. If your condition doesn't improve in six months, then you may have to have the hip replacement. However, if you eat the same diet you have been eating since childhood, the replaced hip will also become damaged just as your doctors have said. But, if you understand the cause of your condition and change that cause, you may never need to have another replacement hip.

Third, in my opinion, the causes of cartilage damage are:

1. Dislocation of the hip bone that may have pinched a nerve in the spine thus affecting the endocrine system, which passes through the spine. The resulting disturbance of hormone function may have caused the kidneys to malfunction and become weak. Weak kidneys cannot keep calcium in the blood, which is needed for bone formation. Therefore, degenerative arthritis might have developed.

2. Weak kidneys cannot maintain blood alkalinity, causing the blood and other body fluids to become acidic. If body fluids are acidic, available calcium is used from bones and teeth to neutralize acidity and calcium will be lost from bone and as a result cartilage is damaged.

Dietary suggestions

Foods to Eat:

50-60% whole grains

20-30% cooked vegetables (except potato, eggplant, tomato)

5-10% sea vegetables—these contain much calcium and magnesium that make bones strong

5% raw vegetables (optional)

1-2 cups per day miso soup—to help increase blood formation

2-3 pieces pickles per meal—rice bran pickles are best

2-3 times per month—any beans

1-2 teaspoons vegetable oil (sesame or olive) per day

Foods to Avoid:

Sugar, sugary foods, cakes, sweetened drinks, alcoholic drinks, drugs, even pain killers (except when you have unbearable pain), high-protein foods including tofu, cheese, and eggs, high-fat foods such as butter, and also coffee and spices.

In order to more thoroughly understand this dietary advice, I strongly advise that you attend macrobiotic classes to learn about these foods and their preparation.

Other Suggestions

Strengthening the kidneys is the first step to strengthening bones and bone cartilage. To strengthen the kidneys:

a. Drink as little as possible so that you urinate 3-4 times maximum per day. If you urinate more often than that, you may be drinking too much.

b. Apply a ginger compress over the kidneys 2-3 times per week.

c. Massage your spine (ask someone in your family to do this for you) from neck to hip bone with a ginger juice/sesame oil mixture (1 teaspoon ginger juice from grated ginger mixed with 1 teaspoon sesame oil).

d. Take a dry sauna to sweat. (If you don't have access to a sauna, do salt baths.)

e. Take a salt bath every other day. To make a salt bath: add 2 pounds of

coarse salt (inexpensive water softener salt is okay) to 24 gallons of warm water in a bath tub and stay in about 20 to 30 minutes.

Sincerely yours,
Herman Aihara

Salt and Kidney Function

About twenty years ago my wife and I began doing a two-month lecture trip every summer. We went from Texas to Toronto and Miami to Vancouver for five years. During that time, we often ate meals at the homes of students who organized the meetings. I realized that the saltiness of their miso soup was very weak to my taste. When I asked them why they didn't put more miso in the soup, they said it would make it too salty. In other words, most American macrobiotic people are very sensitive to salt and cannot eat salty foods. They said that they cannot eat salty foods because they are more yang physically than me and other Japanese people. However, after many years of macrobiotic practice, the miso soup of these same individuals gradually changed and came to resemble the stronger style that I like. I have been wondering why this change occurred.

"Weak kidneys cannot maintain blood alkalinity, causing the blood and other body fluides to become acidic."

Then about ten years ago, in my macrobiotic consultations, many people said they were following a no-salt diet due to their doctor's advice. People were afraid of salt. Even Time magazine published an article that characterized salt as the number one enemy to health. This article was based on the belief that salt causes high blood pressure. However, Dr. William Conners of the Oregon Health Sciences University showed that salt in the diet can actually reduce high blood pressure, but of those who did not have salt in their diet, blood pressure was not reduced. The implication seemed to be that some other factor was responsible for high blood pressure. In my experience of consultations, someone who has been eating a low-or-no-salt diet often suffers from one or more of the following symptoms: insomnia, kidney pain, fatigue, chronic low-grade infections, lack of digestive juices in the stomach, or allergy symptoms.

After many years of consultations, I concluded that these symptoms come from one condition: kidney weakness. If one stays on a no-or-low-salt diet for a long time, in my opinion the kidneys may become weak. Someone who has eaten meat or salty foods for a long time may also develop kidney weakness. Also, one who eats, takes, or inhales chemicals develops weak kidneys. In other words, the kidneys may be weakened by either too little or too much salt or by chemicals. The kidneys may also be weakened by drinking too may fluids.

What does "weak kidneys" mean? What is the function of the kidneys in the body?

The body produces waste substances as carbohydrates, protein, and fats are metabolized. Also, 280,000 cells die every second, which also produces waste products. If these waste substances stay in the body, they will make the body fluids acidic causing nerve malfunction and vital organ malfunction.

The composition of blood must always remain constant. Blood volume must also remain constant. If blood volume did not remain constant, circulation might fail. Too little blood means our body's 60,000,000,000,000 cells might be underfed and die. If

blood volume were too high, heart failure might result. We must remember that blood has to be used over and over again. Some blood is eliminated and replaced, but not much. The blood has to be purified and kept constant in composition and volume. Body function can't be suspended, even for one minute, for the blood to be cleaned. All repairs and adjustments to the blood must be made while the engine is still running. Can you imagine if you had to repair your car as you drove it along the freeway? The kidneys do something similar for the blood.

Blood enters the kidneys and passes through many ducts and tubes, and circulates around tissues and membranes that are capable of reabsorbing or passing dissolved solids, water, minerals, and glucose. In an adult, 125 milliliters (1/8 quart) of liquid per minute is filtered through the kidneys, about 180 liters (about 45 gallons) a day of which 178 liters (44.5 gallons) must be reabsorbed.

Weak kidneys mean that the membranes in the kidneys have become weak and can't do the job of reabsorbing essential substances such as minerals. So, too much of these essential substances are lost. These membranes become weak from being overworked by too much fluid to process, or by too many waste products to eliminate.

Another function of the kidneys, related to reabsorbing minerals, is maintaining an alkaline condition in the blood. Calcium, magnesium, potassium, and most importantly, sodium have to be reabsorbed by the kidneys to maintain an alkaline condition in the blood. If the kidneys are weak, as described above, these minerals are lost in the urine. Also, if someone is eating a no-or-low-salt diet, there may be insufficient sodium in the body to maintain blood alkalinity and their blood condition may tend toward being acidic. Acidic blood creates a condition for many sicknesses to start.

In order to reestablish kidney function, I have been recommending the following:

1. Ginger compress over the kidneys every day.
2. Reduce salt intake for a month and then gradually increase.
3. Walk barefoot on the grass in the early morning when there is dew on the grass. This stimulates an important kidney meridian point in the sole of the foot.
4. Take a sauna or work hard outdoors to induce sweating.
5. Seaside beach sand bath (bury the whole body in beach sand by the sea.
6. Take salt baths.

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What, How, and Why of Salt Baths

To take a salt bath, add 2 pounds of salt to 24 gallons of warm water in a bathtub. Macrobiotic quality sea salt is too expensive for this application. Use pickling, canning, or water-softener salt. Water-softener salt can be purchased at many grocery stores for $3 or $4 for 50 pounds. Don't worry; the salt in the water will not enter your body.

If you use 2 pounds of salt per 24 gallons, it will create a 1 percent salt solution. The salt concentration of this solution is higher than the salt concentration of body fluids, which is normally 0.85 percent. The difference of salt concentration creates osmotic pressure across the skin between the bath water and the body fluids. The skin is semi-permeable to water, but not other substances (minerals, glucose, etc.), so water passes out of the body into the bathtub. Since the fluid volume of the body fluids is thus reduced, but no minerals are lost, the resulting concentration of minerals in the body, especially sodium, goes up.

Let me explain how this can be. If you have 10 ounces of sodium in 100 ounces of water, you could say that the salt concentration was 10 percent. If you could use a filter that reduced the water to 50 ounces, but retained the 10 ounces of sodium, you could say that the salt concentration was 20 percent, doubling the salt concentration without adding any more salt. In a similar manner, this is how a salt bath can increase the sodium concentration in the body fluids without eating additional salt (which is something that people with weak kidneys cannot do).

Another reason I recommend salt baths is that the alkaline water of the salt bath attracts acid in the body and acidic water comes out of the body into the bathtub. This serves to alkalize the body fluids without placing stress on the weak kidneys.

Finally, I recommend salt baths for people who have insomnia. The increased sodium concentration in the body fluids from a salt bath relaxes the nervous system. Many people with insomnia have been able to eliminate medication and start sleeping well by taking salt baths.

Herman Aihara (1920-1998) founded the George Ohsawa Macrobiotic Foundation. He is author of Acid and Alkaline, Learning from Salmon, Kaleidoscope, *and* Milk A Myth of Civilization. *This article first appeared in the May/June 1992 issue of* Macrobiotics Today.