

# HEART DISEASE IN RETREAT

Harris



HEART PATIENTS call it "Dean's Cuisine," a strict diet of heart-healthy fibers with no animal fat and only about 8 percent fat in total calories — four times less than you and I probably consume. Physician Dean Ornish packs his low-sodium vegetable-based pasta meals in Tupperware, so patients in his experiment can take the food home as part of their new lifestyle. His vegetarian chili — extremely low in saturated fats and "devoid of cholesterol" — is a favorite, as is his black-bean dish with salsa and low-fat corn chips.

He makes breakfast easy: hot oatmeal or cold cereal, with a choice of oats, corn, wheat or rice. ● Dean's Cuisine is one part of Ornish's "Optimal Lifestyle Program," an experiment in reversing coronary disease. Twelve people, diagnosed with heart disease, spent one year eating, exercising and relaxing Ornish's way. A comparison group of 17 patients got the brand of cardiologists provide. Ornish hoped that if lifestyle got these then a change in lifestyle could get them out. Without the aid of aimed to clear out some of the plaque that clogged their vital in the program, codirected by researchers Larry Scherwitz exercise for an hour, three times a week. They walk briskly heart an aerobic workout. ● Just as important but perhaps the program are the stress-management exercises, adapted from designed to relax people and focus their thoughts, last an each day and include stretching, breathing, mental imagery, tation. ● When Ornish, at the University of California, San first four patients on this routine three years ago, most car-experiment was doomed to fail. Without drugs, they doubted change, even an intense one, could wipe out any of the deadly



medical care most people into this fix, drugs, the program arteries. ● Patients and Shirley Brown, enough to give their hardest part of the yoga. The exercises, hour and 15 minutes relaxation and medi-Francisco, put his diologists felt his that a lifestyle plaque that had



Clockwise from left: One of Ornish's patients practices stress-reducing stretches, the program's chef displays an array of Dean's Cuisine dishes, a patient demonstrates what weight loss has done for his wardrobe and program participants meet to discuss concerns and progress.

been building up in arteries for decades. But by the end of 1988, with the results in on all 29 patients, Ornish's ideas had won much support. Many specialists came to the 61st annual American Heart Association (AHA) convention last month hoping for the best.

That's what they got. Ten of the first 12 patients in the program had "some meaningful overall reversal of their coronary atherosclerosis." Not every block in every artery got better, but all 10 showed an average overall reversal on the most sophisticated monitors. Only one patient showed no change, and one got slightly worse.

In sharp contrast, heart disease progressed in the comparison group. Eleven of these 17 people got measurably worse. Out of the six who got better, four were women. Both men who improved proudly admitted cheating: They had wanted to get into the experimental program so badly, they made some of Ornish's lifestyle changes on their own.

The successful patients in the experimental group reduced their total cholesterol level by 40 percent and the level of the

harmful kind of cholesterol (low-density lipoprotein) by 60 percent. These were the biggest group drops ever achieved without drugs in an experiment. Patients also brought down their blood pressure, enough in most cases to reduce or go off medications.

News about Dean's Cuisine has triggered fast action in the food industry. The chief executive of one famous company put a task force at work on a frozen-food adaptation of the cuisine's pasta and bean dishes. Ornish huddled with San Francisco caterer Carol Smith and Deborah Madison, author of *The Greens Cookbook*, to create tastier recipes, items that may one day appear in local supermarkets. The Quaker Oats Company and Kellogg already provide Ornish oats and Nutrigrain free for his experiment.

Ornish flew on from the AHA convention to get his next round of lucky guinea pigs heart-checked at Houston's University of Texas Medical Center. That experiment is already under way, cheered on by the program's veterans. Says star patient Robert Finnell, who has lost nearly 40 pounds, "It gets better every year."

—T GEORGE HARRIS