

KEY TO A LONG LIFE

# The Japanese Diet

Japan is often said to have the world's longest life expectancy, but what exactly is the reason behind the longevity of Japanese people? According to Yukio Yamori, a medical Ph.D. who specializes in research on how diet increases longevity, the answer is Japan's standard combination of soy, vegetables, fish and rice, which uses less salt and frequently features soup stock.

Tofu is made from soybeans, and often appears in the Japanese diet. The isoflavones in soy are in a class of phytoestrogens that have effects similar to but slightly weaker than those of estrogenic hormones, which are often considered to be female hormones. In Yamori's experiments and epidemiological studies, isoflavones were shown to moderate the rate of increase in blood pressure, and to reduce the risks of myocardial infarction, stroke, prostate cancer, breast cancer and osteoporosis. In an experiment where menopausal women in Brazil ate about half a block of tofu containing 40 mg of isoflavones per day for three

weeks, for example, their cholesterol levels dropped and calcium loss from bones was attenuated. Since the effect of isoflavones can be maintained when taken along with antioxidant nutrients such as vitamins A, C and E, the health effects increase when soy products are eaten with vegetables.

Furthermore, in areas where people eat a lot of fish and vegetables, cholesterol levels are low, and there is less obesity. That applies to the diets of Japan and the Mediterranean, where mortality rates from major vascular diseases—particularly myocardial infarction—are the lowest in the world. There are a lot of beneficial fatty acids such as DHA and amino acids in seafood, which contribute to health by making it difficult for cholesterol and blood pressure to rise.

Japan has rice as a staple, and Japanese eat a lot of soy, vegetables and fish. Lightly seasoned soy, fish, rice and vegetables could be considered an ideal diet for a long life.