

Book Review

Hawaii Diet

Terry Shintani

Published by Pocket Books, New York 1999, 333 pages

Reviewed by Dr. Gregory Dever*

Each time I go to Hawai'i I try to stop at Borders Bookstore in Honolulu to stock up. In Palau you can always order through Amazon.com over the web, but there's nothing like going into a good bookstore with lots of chairs and no "No Reading" signs. I spotted Dr. Terry Shintani's *Hawaii Diet*, picked it up, and leafed through it. The bright yellow cover stated, "eat all you want", "control your cholesterol and blood sugar", and "loose up to thirty pounds in three weeks". A bright red stamp next to a picture of swaying palms and a setting Hawaiian sun exclaimed, "The diet featured on CNN, CBS, NBC!" The forward was written by Dr Bob

***Hawaii Diet* [is] a measured attempt to show us that we can achieve good health by integrating spiritual values, diet, and lifestyle in a way that allows us to make the most of the cutting-edge principles of modern science.**

Arnot, Chief Medical Correspondent, NBC News - himself a weight control guru. Honest, given the seeming hype, I would never have picked it up except I had known about the diet when it was called *Wainae Diet* developed at the Wainae Coast Comprehensive Health Care Centre (WCCHC) where I once served as a visiting pediatric consultant. The Wainae Coast is on the leeward side of Oahu and has the largest Native Hawaiian population in the world. The WCCHC provides primary health care services to this population. Although Hawai'i is known as the healthiest state in the United State, "the native Hawaiians have the worst health in the nation". According to the easy to read graphs in Appendix 3 of the book, when compared to all races within the U.S., Native Hawaiians have much higher mortality rates for diabetes (7 times), heart diseases (2.8 times), cancer (2.2 times), strokes (2.5 times), accidents (2.1 times), and infectious disease (3.9 times). The prevalence rate for obesity for Native Hawaiians is 64% whereas Caucasian and Afro-American prevalence rates are 26% and 28% respectively. The Wai'anae then *Hawaii Diet* "was conceived in part as a response to the high rates from chronic diet-and-life-style-related disease among Native Hawaiians".

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So out of loyalty to both the WCCHC and a fellow University of Hawai'i grad, I sat in my Borders hardback chair and flipped through the book and came to the back flyleaf to read about the author: Terry Shintani, M.D., J.D., M.P.H., and Director of Prevention Medicine at the WCCHC. Amazing - a lawyer, who upon becoming a vegetarian to improve his own energy levels, questioned why physicians at the time weren't talking more about "the importance of diet in one's health and overall lifestyle". This was very radical stuff for the late 60's. So then Lawyer Shintani decided to go to UH medical school where he admitted he learned little about nutrition and disease prevention (my same complaints in the mid-70's). After graduation he went on to Harvard to get a Masters in Public Health in Nutrition and then back to Hawai'i to the WCCHC where he became Director of Prevention Medicine. And there he developed the Wainae then *Hawaii Diet* - "a measured attempt to show us that we can achieve good health by integrating spiritual values, diet, and lifestyle in a way that allows us to make the most of the cutting-edge principles of modern science."

Chapter 1 starts off - "Congratulations. By picking up this book, you have taken the first step toward changing your life" OK. Dr Shintani then goes on to explain that the purpose of the book is to help "maximize your health and, in the process, minimize your weight." Amen to that. To do this we would "give a new perspective on health .. through the lens of some universal principles embodied in six basic Hawaiian healing concepts." And he would also explain the science behind the health effects of the *HawaiiDiet* supported by 170 references in the Bibliography. The diet will help you:

- control weight while eating food.
- control blood sugar while eating more carbohydrates.
- control blood cholesterol while eating more fats.
- live healthier and longer.
- minimize, with the help of your doctor, your need for medications, and
- adjust your diet to suit your genetic type.

The *HawaiiDiet* is not a diet in the conventional sense... It is, rather, a program that shows you how to loose weight by maximizing your health." Through analyzing the traditional Native Hawaiian diet and researching the diets of other pre-modern cultures, Dr. Shintani has observed what he calls the Hawaiian Paradox "Native Hawaiians have among the highest rates of obesity in the world in modern times. However in ancient times, the Hawaiians ate much more food but they weighed much less." In implementing the Wai'anae Diet at WCCHC, Dr Shintani went back to recommending traditional (local) unrefined foods that although filling provided satiety without providing the calo-

ries of the refined calorie-rich contemporary Western diet. According to Dr Shintani (and published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition - 53(1991) 1647S-1651S) the results of the Wai'anae Diet were "startling". Native Hawaiians eating large amounts of traditional Hawaiian food lost weight - "an average of seventeen pounds in three weeks." He states: "When we measured the amount of food they were eating on the program, we found that it was an average of 4.1 pounds of food per day compared to an average of 3.6 pounds per day while not on the program. Yet every participant lost weight on the program." Also noted in the program participants were decreases in total blood cholesterol in HDL ("good cholesterol") levels of over 7%, a decrease in the cholesterol to HDL ration from 6.3 to 5.7, a decrease in triglycerides of 23% and a decrease in blood glucose levels of 24%. Many of the diabetic patients in the study - "with the help of their physicians" - were able to stop or reduce their insulin requirements. Many patients with high blood pressure were able to eliminate their anti-hypertensive medications altogether. The key scientific (and historical) principle behind the results was the high mass-to-energy ratio of whole unrefined traditional (local) foods which are also high in fiber and rich in vitamins, antioxidants, and phytochemical. These foods were not only nutritious but also provided satiety with fewer calories. This is different from the low mass-to-energy ratios of processed refined foods common in the Western diet.

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The Wainae then *HawaiiDiet* approach does not look at the number of calories per ounce of food but rather the amount of weight there is in food per calorie. In an effort to show "people of every ethnic background how they could lose weight while eating more food", Dr Shintani developed the SMI Index (Shintani Mass Index), which categorizes foods by their weight-to-energy ratio in order to promote the concept of using high mass-to-energy ratio foods as in the traditional Hawaiian diet.

Chapters one through six clearly explain the cultural, spiritual, and scientific background, rationale, and study results of the diet particularly its effects on weight loss, blood glucose, cholesterol, LDL, HDL, the cholesterol/HDL ratio, and blood triglycerides. Chapter seven gives daily meal-by-meal menus for three weeks for the three variations of the *HawaiiDiet*. For you gourmets, Chapters 8 through 21 contain detailed recipes to achieve the *HawaiiDiet*. This book is supported by an extensive

Glossary that will help both the layperson and the professional alike understand all the Hawaiian language and scientific terms.

HawaiiDiet is well written and puts scientific principles for its diet in a traditional and spiritual perspective. Simply put, the diet makes good sense and reinforces what many have been saying throughout the Pacific for years: eat lots of local foods.

Healthy people are those who live in healthy homes on a healthy diet; in an environment equally fit for birth, growth, work, healing and dying ... Healthy people need no bureaucratic interference to mate, give birth, share human conditions and die.

Ivan Illich in *Medical Nemesis*