



# craving chinese

Could there really be something about Chinese food that keeps Chinese women healthier for longer?

BY DR. ART HISTER



*A traditional Chinese diet includes a lot more veggies and fish than meat or processed foods*

know it's a stereotype, but hey, stereotypes are based on reality. So, even more than gefilte fish, even more than roast chicken and tzimmes and knishes, even more than holy smoked meat, my mom, a typical Jewish woman of a certain age, would rather eat Chinese food.

Why? Because Chinese food helps you live longer, my mom has long insisted.

"Can't you see how many old Chinese people there are in here?" my mom has often asked me as I've paid for yet

another meal at her favourite Chinese eatery.

And for a change, she's right: there *are* a whole lot of old Chinese eating in Chinese restaurants.

If you want to know why, a great clue comes from a terrific report published recently in *PLoS Medicine* (the *PLoS* stands for Public Library of Science, a group dedicated to publishing unbiased studies, i.e., studies with no funding constraints from groups with interests in the outcomes).

This report was a

periodic update from an ongoing study called the Shanghai Women's Health Study, a look at the health and lives of a large group of 75,000 Chinese women.

In this update, researchers concluded that healthier lifestyle-related factors were "*significantly and independently* [my emphasis] associated with a lower risk of total and cause-specific mortality."

In English, that means the more healthy things these Chinese women were doing,

men in China who have never smoked);

- Enjoying a higher fruit and vegetable intake. Sadly, this factor is changing for the worse. Whereas a traditional Chinese diet includes a large intake of veggies and fish and a small intake of meat and processed foods, a wealthier China is now experiencing an enormous growth in people who eat mainly a Western-style diet with all the fat, meat, salt, sugar and processed crap we've been

the longer they could expect to live. What were these healthy lifestyle factors? Same-old, same-old:

- Maintaining a normal weight;
- Having a lower waist-hip ratio (WHR is a measure of "abdominal obesity" since weight around the middle is considered less healthy than weight stored elsewhere on the body);
- Participating somewhat regularly in exercise, although it really didn't have to be much or vigorous exercise;
- Never being exposed to spousal smoking (to be honest, I'm amazed they were able to find even 10

getting regularly here for several decades.

Anyway, the bottom line here is easy: Chinese women who live a less healthy lifestyle (according to those simple factors enumerated above) have a significantly increased risk of dying from any cause over a course of about two decades, compared to women who eat their veggies, watch their weight, do some exercise, don't smoke and don't expose themselves to others who smoke.

You still don't think it's worth trying to do all that? ■

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