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**Fountain of Youth, Rediscovered**

The Original ‘Fountain of Youth’ – Sometime in early April 1513, the Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de Leon, with three large sailing vessels, dropped anchor near the site of present-day St. Augustine, Florida. Since his arrival just happened to coincide with the Easter feast, he christened the newly discovered land “La Florida”, which he promptly claimed for Spain.

His expedition had been in search for some time of a legendary spring possessed with miraculous waters capable of restoring lost youth. The primitive Native Americans with whom they came in contact seemed to give this myth some credence, for many of the older tribespeople looked almost as young as their adult children.

But alas! This fabled ‘fountain’ with its magical waters would forever prove elusive to those seeking it. Poor Ponce soon left with his party to explore the coast down to Key West, never finding what he had hoped to gain. Little did he know, though, that it was not enchanting waters, but rather the local tropical foods that gave the natives their natural and easily-acquired youthful vibrancy.

No one had yet heard of the ubiquitous, linear polysaccharide known as Hyaluronic acid (HA); nor would they for almost another five centuries. In the distant future, it would be left to the Japanese for essentially discovering and introducing HA to the world.

**The Village of Long Life**

We cannot fault Ponce for having no ambition – he was certainly endowed with plenty of that. It is just that he looked in all the wrong places for the substance that keeps the body young. He probably would have been better off sailing in the direction of the Orient. For there in Japan is something that keeps old age at a distance, while people mature gracefully into their 80’s and 90’s without appearing to be so advanced in years.

The village of Yusuri Hara, just two hours outside of Tokyo, is where time stands still for many elderly residents. More than 10 percent of the population is 85 or older – almost ten times the American norm. Not only are these older villagers living longer, but also enjoying life more. Most of them are healthy, and still look and feel in their prime, as they redefine the word “senior” in ways we never expected.

The older people in this village have successfully managed to keep their skin tones supple, resilient, vibrant, and wrinkle-free. This, in and of itself, may seem like something of an accomplishment. Then, consider that many of them have been chain-smokers and exposed to the blazing sun for most of their lives. Suddenly, it becomes evident that this is nothing short of a real health miracle!

What is going on here anyway? Medical science has firmly established that if people are heavy smokers, they will eventually end up becoming sick and decrepit. Also, any licensed dermatologist will tell you that if you spend too much time under the sun, your skin will eventually look and feel as tough and crinkled as shoe leather.

So, why is the geriatric set of Yuzuri Hara still in possession of much of their youthful vigor, vitality, and good looks, in spite of their abominable tobacco habit and dangerous preference for so much outdoor sunshine? The answer again, of course, is the big HA, Hyaluronic Acid. It almost seems like the cells of these elderly people have been put into some kind of genetic ‘time lock’, where the epidermis retains moisture and elasticity, the joints stay lubricated, and eye retinas never harden nor lose their visual clarity. However, neither pre-Conquest Florida, nor modern Japan, are the only places on earth where extended youth is a reality and not a mere dream.

Not too long ago, I went to my local church one Sunday morning to hear separate reports from the pulpit given by a retired couple, who had just returned from an eighteen month mission in the Philippines. Though I found the husband’s narrative more appealing because of its faith-based contents, yet as a research scientist and health care provider, I found his wife’s remarks very intriguing, to say the least.

Only a woman has the self-endowed capacity to notice “little things” that would pass by the gaze of the average man, yet some of these “little things” that she talked about immediately commanded my full attention. I hastily scribbled down some notations of what was said on the back of a printed church program. I herewith quote them just as they were uttered that day by her.

“One thing that constantly struck me, during all the time we were there, was the youthful appearance of many of the older people. I mean they looked so young! Why look at me at age 69; I am wrinkled as a prune! Even my wrinkles have wrinkles! We worked with fellow church members and potential converts whom we knew to be in their seventies and eighties, who looked about half the age of Desmond (her husband) and I! And they matched their great looks with equal agility and strength. I kept wishing that I could have just half of their energy!”

So, now we find further evidence from a country in the Pacific Ocean, which happens to lie in an equatorial zone. This means it is ‘hot as Hades’ much of the year, except in wintertime when nature’s air conditioning comes on and temperatures drop a few notches to a somewhat ‘cooler’ low-to-mid 70’s! Again, we find that it is HA, pure and simple, which accounts for all of this.

**Investigating The Food Chain**

Diet! DIET! DIET! That is where Ponce and the missionary couple should have looked. Japanese scientists were smart enough to analyze the long lives of the people from Yuzuri Hara, and find that certain starch foods and gelatinous root vegetables seem to encourage the body to produce more of its own HA.

Yuzuri Hara’s hilly terrain is better suited to growing and harvesting those types of different carbohydrates that stimulate HA production. Foods such as satsumaimo, a type of sweet potato; satoimo, a sticky white potato; konyaku, a gelatinous root concoction; and imoji, a potato root.

Having been to the Philippines myself, in times past, I can certainly account for a wide variety of foods in the native diets that would encourage increased HA in older bodies. I have made a short list of some of the more popular items that are either carbohydrate-rich or contain large amounts of gelatinous materials similar to things consumed in Japan’s Yuzuri Hara village. Most of the items are indigenous to the Philippines, but some are more common.

**Tukod-langit** *(Helmintostachys zeylanica):* These underground starchy rhizomes (similar to parsnips) are regularly chewed, and the tender leaves make wonderful salads.

**Kapaya** *(Carica papaya):* Commonly known as Papaya, this nutritiously sweet, enzyme-rich fruit is abundant and wildly popular with everyone.

**Lansones** *(Lansium domesticum):* This whitish-yellow, sugary fruit occurs in bunches, which resemble those of grapes, and are a great favorite with the Filipinos.

**Abukado** (*Persea Americana):* Avocados are extensively cultivated throughout the Philippines. Unlike most other fruits, however, they have an extremely high protein content, yet a lower than usual carbohydrate level, since it contains almost no sugar.

**Damong-ilalin** *(Ottelia alismoides):* Children frequently seek this carbohydrate-rich fruit, because of its incredible sweetness. Even adults indulge.

**Kasui** *(Anacardium occidentale):* This is a very peculiar fruit. The lower part is a large, soft, yellow, juicy, peer-shaped structure for eating purposes that has all the characteristics of a delicious fleshy fruit. The top part is a kidney-shaped nut (similar to an almond), which has an excellent flavor when roasted. These nuts are sealed in cans, or in plastic bags, as a commercial product. The general populace regards them as a great delicacy.

**Manga** *(Mangifera indica):* Mangos, with their yellow fleshy fruit, have a very high carbohydrate content and are quite nutritious.

In my own studies, which have been separate from those conducted by others in Japan, I have found that the true secret of the virtually ‘endless’ youthfulness of most Filipinos is their diet-rich foods that automatically trigger production spurts of HA within them.

**The Supplement Side of Staying Young**

While many of us could certainly stand for a dietary makeover of some kind, it is not always practical to be the before mentioned foods every day of our lives. Granted that they definitely do boost HA levels within the body, but our own taste buds, brain preferences, and food favorites would not allow this to happen for very long.

So, the next best thing is to strike a harmonious balance between the periodic intake of these foods and additional HA from supplements. Adding HA to the daily regimen will encourage cell renewal, glandular and organ resuscitation, muscle and joint refurbishment, visual regeneration, and skin revitalization. This integrated approach combining nourishing foods and additional help from HA supplements will virtually guarantee the typical man and woman past 40 to continue looking, feeling and exhibiting healthy vibrancy even when they hit 80 and beyond!

The diseases of old age often become things of the past when HA is reintroduced into the body through wise supplement choice and prudent food selections (those that boost HA levels). The medical evidence is certainly there to back this up:

Clinical Orthopedics 385:130-43 (April 2001). A controlled trial was conducted with 226 patients with knee osteoarthritis. Those injected with 30 mg. of sodium HA experienced considerably greater knee motions with far less pain than did the control group receiving a placebo saline solution. (Numerous other studies have been done and reported in the medical literature with regard to the tremendous benefits that Hyaluronic acid produces in patients with knee osteoarthritis.)

Ophthalmology: High-molecular-weight HA plays a predominant role in ocular microsurgery. It has proven to be of enormous value in cataract extractions, with or without intraocular lens implantation, as well as in other delicate eye procedures such as vitreous-retinal operations.

Wound Repair: Many of the biological reactions facilitated by HA are central to wound healing sequences. After injury, wound healing relies on a series of tightly regulated sequential events, i.e., inflammation, development of tissue granulation, re-epithelization, and finally, remodeling. HA manifests a variety of actions in the mediation of these cellular and matrix events. HA has demonstrated unsurpassed value in the treatment of acute and chronic wounds such as abrasions, incisions, burns, skin ulcers, and pressure sores over conventional therapeutic agents.

Hyaluronic acid (HA) can be said, without doubt, to be a literal blessing to mankind. Through proper dieting and adequate supplementing, there is no reason for a person not to live many more years FREE from wrinkles, joint stiffness, muscle weakness, and dim vision. Why Ponce de Leon would have been positively thrilled had he known about HA in his time – which proves, after all, that there is always some truth in myth. Eternal youth can belong to those determined and disciplined enough to make Hyaluronic Acid a regular part of their daily routines for the rest of their naturally youthful lives!

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