

"The Father of Vitamins"



As the hot summer wears on, it makes me want to eat *hiyajiru* - Miyazaki's famous local chilled soup dish. Of course, you can't have *hiyajiru* without cucumbers – it turns out that Miyazaki was the top producer of cucumbers in the country last year (2021). The prefecture also ranked second in the country for growing peppers. Both cucumbers and peppers are rich in vitamin C - like minerals, vitamins don't provide any energy in and of themselves, but instead work to help break down and absorb proteins, fats and sugars, and so are essential for maintaining a healthy body. In this month's *Living In Miyazaki*, we'd like to write a little about a local hero from Miyazaki who made a great contribution to the discovery of vitamins, often referred to as "the Father of Vitamins."

Takaki Kanehiro (1849-1920) was born in what is now Takaoka, part of Miyazaki City. From a young age, he set his mind on studying medical science, and went to the UK to study clinical medicine. When he returned to Japan, he began researching beriberi. At the time, beriberi was thought to be an infectious disease spread by bacteria – it causes damage to peripheral nerves, which leads to numbness and sometimes paralysis of the lower limbs, which can even be fatal in severe cases. Kanehiro thought that the cause of beriberi was not bacteria, but potentially the Japanese rice-centered diet – he felt that this hypothesis was worth testing, and so began conducting experiments. While doing so, he noticed that the condition of beriberi patients who ate bread, meat and vegetables started to improve. He then introduced the vitamin content from bread into the Japanese diet in the form of boiled rice and barley, which drastically reduced the number of cases of beriberi.



Kanehiro's research later led to the discovery of vitamins, and once the existence and effects of vitamins were widely known, Kanehiro's foresight was held in particularly high regard. Thanks to this, he became known as "the Father of Vitamins." Kanehiro also sought to advance the field of Japanese medicine, establishing medical and nursing schools, as well as hospitals for poorer people, playing a key role in the development of medicine and nursing care here in Japan.

Nowadays, during the pandemic, people certainly appreciate the value of a society in which people can live safely and healthily thanks to a well-established healthcare system. I think we should be proud of our very own Kanehiro, who worked hard to try and create such a society.

The long, hot summer will carry on for a while – make sure to stay healthy this season by eating our local cucumbers and peppers – they grow plenty of them in Miyazaki!

※The original Japanese version of this article will be uploaded onto the website of the Miyazaki International Foundation soon.

If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions regarding this column, please contact the Miyazaki International Foundation (MIF):

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Also, if you ever have any questions or concerns about daily life in Miyazaki, please feel free to get in touch with the Miyazaki Support Center for Foreign Residents:

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