

Plant-based diet called heart fix

Doctor stresses the importance of nitric oxide

BY HEATHER SCHROERING

Special to Tribune Newspapers

In Tarahumara natives of Mexico and the highlanders of Papua New Guinea, coronary heart disease is rare. Some call them superhumans, but it makes perfect sense to Dr. Caldwell B. Esselstyn of the Wellness Institute at the Cleveland Clinic.

"There are millions of people who will never have heart disease, and the common denominator is that they are largely all plant-based (eaters)," he said.

For 20 years, Esselstyn, who is director of Cardiovascular Disease Prevention & Reversal Program, studied 17 heart patients who adopted a plant-based, oil-free nutrition foundation. His book, "Prevent & Reverse Heart Disease: The Revolutionary, Scientifically Proven, Nutrition-Based Cure," outlines this study and promotes this strategy as an aggressive solution.

Esselstyn says heart disease is a "completely foodborne illness" perpetuated by the Western diet. Processed foods are the primary culprit, he said, especially any oils, including olive, corn, sunflower, soybean, coconut and palm.

Though some categorize olive oil and other oils as good fats, Esselstyn said oils are low in nutritive value and are 100 percent fat calories. One tablespoon of olive oil has about 120 calories, he added, and the monounsaturated and saturated fat in oil is damaging to important cells in the blood vessels.

Endothelial cells, called the "life jacket" of our blood vessels, line the innermost part of the



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The chief weapon in the plant-based diet for cardiac repair is leafy greens with no added oil, says Dr. Caldwell B. Esselstyn, author of "Prevent & Reverse Heart Disease."

artery; they make nitric oxide, which protects the heart. Esselstyn called nitric oxide a "magic molecule" that keeps the blood flowing, helps prevent blockages, keeps arteries from becoming inflamed and helps the heart widen during physical activity. However, oil and other foods Esselstyn names destroy the capacity for cells to make nitric oxide.

People develop cardiovascular disease "because they have so sufficiently trashed, injured and impaired the capacity of their endothelial cells to make nitric oxide to protect them," Esselstyn said.

And it starts when we're young. Esselstyn points to studies that showed evidence of coronary disease when autopsies were done on young men and women who died of other causes between age 17 and 34.

The basis for Esselstyn's nutrition program is whole grains in cereal, bread and pasta; more than 100 types of beans and legumes; potatoes; fruit; red and yellow vegetables; and, most of all, leafy greens. These foods encourage nitric oxide. Food high in antioxidants is especially good for those who have blockages, according to his

regimen. He suggests strawberries, raspberries or blueberries on cereal.

But, he said, nothing can compete with several daily servings of antioxidants in leafy greens, such as bok choy, Swiss chard, kale, collards, beet, mustard and carrot greens, cilantro, parsley, spinach and arugula, as well as napa cabbage, Brussels sprouts, broccoli, cauliflower and asparagus.

He says pills and vitamins that supposedly supply nutrients aren't as beneficial. And for those who want to relegate all this to the juicer, he added that chewing food is better, because fructose separated from fiber is absorbed too rapidly and is damaging.

Esselstyn said he has seen a plant-based diet reverse plaque buildup and halt symptoms such as chest pain, angina and erectile dysfunction. Major improvements in patients are possible in less than a year, he added.

"All of those non-plaque-containing vessels can suddenly be renewed to create additional nitric oxide," he said.

Esselstyn's program isn't for everyone, however, and Dr. Yoni Freedhoff, medical director of the

Bariatric Medical Institute in Ottawa, Ontario, recognizes that.

"There are people out there who absolutely have dramatically improved their health, longevity and quality of lives with very strict plant-based diets, but we're all built differently," said Freedhoff, who specializes in weight management and writes the blog WeightyMatters.ca.

Freedhoff said people who want to make big changes in their diet should start by replacing the least healthy meal in their diet with a more nutritious option and go from there.

As for meat, minimizing rather than eliminating it is a more realistic goal initially, he said, and avoiding processed meats is a good idea. He encourages having fattier fish a few times a week and said there is clear evidence that diets rich in fatty fish are good for cardiovascular health. In addition, he recommends fruits and vegetables.

"I'd rather somebody embrace imperfection and live the healthiest life they could enjoy," Freedhoff said.

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Kids' role models found in Bulls players

Keilman, from Page 1

you're in the circle or you're out of the circle. You want to be in? Let's go. You don't want to be in? That's fine too. Let's go."

The Bulls appear to be a pretty leakproof outfit, so the sporting press immediately tried to decode Thibodeau's "circle" comment for clues about his supposed conflicts with management or some of the players. That's not how I took it, though.

To me, the circle is just a symbol for doing things the right way. When Thibodeau uses it, he's talking about boxing out on rebounds or helping on defense. At my house it means doing homework neatly or loading the dishwasher properly.

It sounds goofy, I know, but one of the biggest struggles I have as a parent is convincing my kids to put effort into what they're doing. If I have to borrow inscrutable metaphors from a grouchy basketball coach to get through to them, I'm happy to do it.

But any team can provide talking points about hard work and focus. What's special about the Bulls is how they teach lessons relevant to other parts of life, such as how to treat people.

Many times we have pointed out to our kids how excited the Bulls bench players get when their teammates do something good on the floor, even when you know those players are dying to be out there themselves.

One great example came last year, when TNT put a microphone on Carlos Boozer, at the time the Bulls' highly paid, modestly performing power forward. Boozer, now with the Los Angeles Lakers, rarely played toward the end of games, something he was not happy about. But you would never know that

from the way he cheered his teammates.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAH!" he shouted, leaping to his feet when reserve player Tony Snell threw down a fourth-quarter dunk.

"Space jam! I see you, Tone!"

I don't expect that kind of enthusiasm from my kids, but it would be nice if they showed a little excitement when their sibling makes a nice play on the soccer field or brings home an A on a test. A high-five, a pat on the back or just a kind word would mean a lot more coming from them than it would from their parents.

Most of all, the Bulls, particularly in the person of Derrick Rose, illustrate what it means to believe in yourself through misfortune. I can't think of many superstar athletes who have come back from one devastating injury, only to be dealt another, all the while being doubted by fair-weather fans and myopic pundits.

But like The Dude, D. Rose abides. He never rose to the critics' bait, but instead kept going through two rehabs and a bunch of subpar games until, just recently, he started to play like the MVP he once was. It's a lesson in persistence that speaks for itself.

It's always a dicey proposition to hold up millionaire pro athletes as role models for children — the first piece of sports memorabilia I bought for my son was a Michael Vick jersey, and that didn't work out so well — but the Bulls have given me no reason for wariness. They seem like good dudes who work hard, support each other and persevere through tough times.

I point all that out to my kids because I want them to be in the circle too. Let's go.

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Campaign offers support to struggling new moms



HEIDI STEVENS
Balancing Act

Here's what #SoGladTheyToldMe is: a campaign to broaden the way we portray and talk about motherhood.

Here's what it's not: another salvo in the so-called Mommy Wars.

Blogger and mother of two Stephanie Sprenger launched the movement in response to an essay by fellow blogger and mother Jenny Studenroth Gerson.

Gerson wrote an essay, "They should've warned me," about her smooth, peaceful transition to motherhood — a surprising contrast to the cautionary tales she received throughout her pregnancy.

"Warnings, warnings everywhere about what was to come," she wrote. "From the excruciating, mind-numbing pain of childbirth to the shell of my former self I was about to become once I had her."

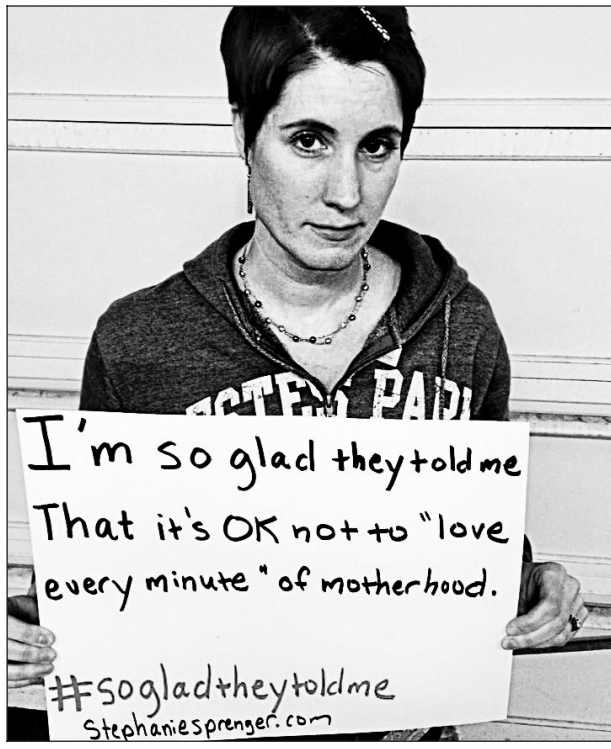
Instead, she wrote, she fell instantly in love with her daughter, more deeply in love with her husband and didn't mind the sleep deprivation. Her essay was picked up by Huffington Post and went viral.

Sprenger wrote an essay in response, "I'm glad they warned me," which pointed out that lots of women struggle with the changes wrought by motherhood.

"We need to find a way to prepare mothers for the possibility that they may struggle, and that it doesn't make them bad mothers," she wrote.

Her essay was also picked up by Huffington Post and also went viral.

They have different opinions. They have different experiences. They are not at war.



Stephanie Sprenger launched the #SoGladTheyToldMe campaign to encourage new moms to share struggles.

This is worth noting in a culture that reflexively turns the most nuanced and personal of topics — child-rearing — into a catfight, pitting loving, thoughtful mothers in an endless, fictional battle from which no one emerges the victor.

"She shared her truth, which was valid and beautiful," Sprenger told me about Gerson's essay. "This is not meant to be divisive."

Anyway: the campaign. Sprenger said her essay response was met with a flood of support.

Sprenger quoted some of the emails she received: "I cried while reading your response." "I have felt so guilty and ashamed."

She decided to turn the emails into a larger conversation.

On her blog, she invited moms to take photos of themselves holding a #SoGladTheyToldMe sign and share it on social media.

"Things like this," she wrote:

■ "That sometimes you don't fall in love with your baby right away, and that's OK."

■ "That postpartum depression happens, and that it's not your fault."

■ "That your marriage may need a long, difficult period of adjustment. It's normal."

■ "That it's OK to ask for help. There is help."

"I believe that there is a way to provide realistic, supportive guidance to new mothers without assaulting them with overwhelming, negative warnings," she wrote.

I hope the campaign, more than anything, provides comfort to the countless new moms who aren't finding needed support.

And I hope the dialogue stays focused on making room for all sorts of voices, experiences and emotions.

The opposite, that is, of a war.

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Life coach no stand-in for buddies, barstool



CHRIS ERSKINE
The Middle Ages

Alexander the Great's "life coach" was Aristotle. Mine is a chatty blond who used to work in entertainment. Same thing.

For our first session, she comes into the dark restaurant like we all do, adjusting from the outdoors to the indoors, blinking to keep her pupils from exploding, finally making out the faint man-child in the corner booth — me.

I smile. She smiles. The grumpy Los Angeles waiter arrives. We order. Game on.

"Lots of people come to life coaches after they've been in therapy," she explains. "Who doesn't need a little work?"

When friends and co-workers heard I was seeing a life coach, some were stunned, for they never realized how messed up I am. I make plans, then don't follow them. I hate white wine. Culturally, I'm adrift, almost promiscuous. I openly enjoy Nickelback, for example, and once caught myself humming along to a Taylor Swift song. Like Taylor, I write in my room (in pajamas, surrounded by gigantic pillows).

And lately, I've been having tiny existential moments. Nothing serious, mostly a post-holiday funk. The other night, I was emceeding another too-long banquet, and I looked out into the tired eyes of 200 guests all wishing they were home watching "Scandal."

"Me too!" I wanted to scream. "I wish I were home watching 'Scandal' too!"

And I don't even like "Scandal."

So here I am seeing a life coach, the one my buddy Green recommended, after he confessed to needing a little guidance with his life. Green has a great career, two houses, two lovely daughters, a wife. I think he hit the jackpot. So, if Green needs a little help, I need a little help.

Have you heard of life coaches? Their tactics are varied, but generally, they take a more practical approach to traditional therapy, with an emphasis on career and performance.

First, you have to get outside yourself and the "monkey chatter" of your mind, life coach Kathy Dailey tells me, citing all the wasteful things we often fret over.

"Some people become paralyzed with what others are thinking," she says. "But the odds are that they're not thinking about you at all ... they're thinking about their own stuff."

How is this different from therapy? My life coach explains that she treats the heart, not the mind. Dailey also insists that she feels unconditional love for me, no matter what I reveal in our introductory session. She's not here to treat me, Dailey says, just help me find the tools to treat myself.

"It's all about energy and communication," she says of solving my midwinter doldrums.

"You also have to allow yourself time to not do," she says, "so you can have the energy to do what you have to do."

"Learn how to sit ... just do nothing," she says.

I used to be the master of the idle moment, though lately I've been bustling about, setting rodent traps in the attic, prepping for baseball tryouts, organizing the dork-wads I play touch football with — don't underestimate the turmoil of that.

Hence, I've had little free time. So what Coach

Dailey says about timeouts rings very true.

"I help a client reshape the way they think," she explains. "I tell people, 'Don't tell me what you're thinking. Tell me what you're feeling.'"

She says that she's big on people taking back control of their lives, and that if I decide to hire her as my life coach, I'll have to commit to a minimum of three months of weekly sessions, though she prefers six months.

"You need a little work," she says with a smile.

Thing is, when it comes to life coaches, Dailey may not be enough. Bring back Lombardi, or bring in Belichick, even that nut case Pete Carroll, who's sort of an idol of mine. I've always had a special place in my heart for nut cases.

"Every time I hear that phrase, I laugh," one friend said of "life coach."

"Go see your pastor," suggested another.

Look, I think we all need good advice now and then, professional and otherwise; there is still no substitute for a beer, a bar stool and a good pal who listens.

In that sense, my buddy Stephen — a little older, way wiser — could qualify as a life coach. When I told him about this session with Dailey, he cited an ancient Roman proverb, roughly reading: "Serve the wine and lay out the dice. To hell with the one who cares about tomorrow. Death, plucking at the ear, says, 'Live it up; I'm coming.'"

"That's my life coach talking," he says.

Stephen signs off with: "Make sure that, at the moment you shuffle off this mortal coil, your list of regrets is as short as you could possibly have made it."

Now there's a plan.

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