



Kim Scheuer, MD, Is Empowering Aspen's County Employees to Reach Peak Health

By
April 16 2021

Kim Scheuer, MD, experienced the power of lifestyle medicine firsthand, when she transitioned from a vegetarian diet filled with [cheese](#) and junk food to a vegan diet rich in [whole grains](#) and vegetables and saw her health markers improve dramatically. Today, she is changing lives for people around her town of Aspen, Colorado, both in working with her patients and in piloting CHIP, a lifestyle medicine program, for Pitkin County employees.

What got you interested in plant-based eating?

When I was 47, a friend who was in nutrition school asked if she could do a three-day food study on what I ate. I thought I ate better than 97 percent of Americans, as I'd been vegetarian since I was 21. But she analyzed my diet and told me that I ate like crap. I was a cheese-aholic and junk-food vegetarian who never ate anything green. That day, about nine years ago, I went vegan. [I found that] I was eating way more food than I had previously—and my weight dropped, cholesterol plummeted, and energy significantly improved, which I really noticed in my workouts. I started using it with my patients, and the results were awesome. ... I was upset I hadn't been taught this in medical school. I went to conferences, took courses, and then got board-certified in lifestyle medicine, opening my own lifestyle medicine practice, DOKS, in Aspen with my partner, Derek Olsen, a registered nurse.

What is the Complete Health Improvement Program (CHIP), and why did it appeal to you?

[CHIP](#) is a 10- to 12-week evidence-based lifestyle medicine program, which encourages a [whole-food, plant-based diet](#). It appealed to me since it's so comprehensive and has proven over many years to be successful with thousands of participants.

How did you come to implement it with Pitkin County employees?

I had become a CHIP facilitator to help prep for my lifestyle medicine boards, and for years, I had tried unsuccessfully to get various groups [to adopt the program]. Meanwhile, through DOKS, we were showing documentaries like [Forks Over Knives](#) at the library. A library employee who happened to be involved with wellness at the county talked us up to the county leaders. So we pitched CHIP, got financial support, and started our pilot program. We started with a group of 12 men and women, but right after our first meeting, the pandemic shutdown started, and only six were able to continue online.

What results did participants experience?

Even though I knew what lifestyle medicine and plant-based eating could do for people, I was still shocked by the results, especially given that we started with some healthy, already skinny folks. Average total cholesterol [for the group] went down 15 points, and the largest [individual] drop was 42 points. LDL went down 20.5 points on average, with the biggest individual drop at 36 points. Average blood sugar decrease was 11 points, the best being 30. And by the end of the program, the only person who had been on blood pressure medication dropped her blood pressure to 118/78 without medications. And 100 percent said they felt that CHIP improved their outlook on life.

How can people learn more about CHIP?

If an individual would like to get involved with CHIP, they can contact me at [DOKS Lifestyle Medicine](#), or they can go directly to the [CHIP website](#).

To learn more about a whole-food, plant-based diet, visit our [Plant-Based Primer](#). For meal-planning support, check out [Forks](#)

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Meal Planner, FOK's easy weekly meal-planning tool to keep you on a healthy plant-based path.