

Fit Doesn't Mean Healthy ... Now at 50 I'm Both!

By Suzanna McGee
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I am a former Ms. Natural Olympia drug-free bodybuilding champion. My mantra used to be "protein, protein, protein!" Six times a day, I ate chicken, meat, fish, egg whites, or whey—up to 300 grams a day! I thought this was the right way to eat. I never ate fast food, and my foods were pretty clean, but I knew nothing about dairy and [animal products dangers](#).

Eventually, I became a competitive tennis player. I ate less protein, as my body felt better that way. I was eating more and more like a vegetarian. Greek yogurt and kefir were meals and passions on my daily menu. As a performance coach and injury prevention specialist, my focus was mostly on the human athletic performance. But then many of my closed friends and family members started to succumb to chronic disease, cancers, heart attacks (one in the middle of a tennis match), and I turned my focus more toward longevity and aging youthfully.

Then I saw the [Forks Over Knives](#) movie. It left tremendous impressions on me. I was so inspired and motivated by all the experts speaking in the movie. They radiated health and knowledge, and I wanted to know more. I picked up Dr. Esselstyn's book and read it from cover from cover. I decided to do a personal experiment: for three months, I would go on his low fat, plant-based program. I would measure my cholesterol before and after, and I would see if this program made any difference for a seemingly healthy and super fit athlete like me. Giving up the Greek yogurt was the hardest thing for me, but I found other ways to satisfy my taste buds, and after a couple of weeks, it was no problem at all.

My cholesterol before the experiment was 171. It was great according to the standard measures, but I was not pleased with it, because my new target was Dr. Esselstyn's. It needed to go below 150. After my three-month experiment, it was at 147. I was truly impressed.

Also, I felt great, and my performance and recovery from training have improved. At age 50, I am fitter than ever. Since then, I have read all the works of [Dr. Campbell](#), [McDougall](#), [Esselstyn](#), [Ornish](#), [Barnard](#),

[Fuhrman](#), and others. I also got certified as a plant-based nutrition specialist through Dr. Campbell's eCornell distance learning program.

Today I enthusiastically share my experience with everybody willing to listen to my constant "rant" about the plant-based diet. I have managed to inspire almost all of my student athletes, and they have also embraced plant-based living. My next step is to inspire hundreds of athletes, through my book on [plant-based nutrition](#) for athletes. Just because we athletes look fit and healthy from outside doesn't mean that we are healthy inside. We want to perform well now but also live healthfully for a long time. We don't need to sacrifice our longevity for performance. I know deep inside that this is the right way to eat and live, and I am truly thankful to Forks Over Knives for changing the direction of my life!

This post was update in May 2015 to update links.