



# Why I Abandoned Traditional Cardiology to Become the “Healthy Heart Doc”

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## Spider-Man and Me: Parallel Tragedies

Spider-Man was my favorite superhero growing up. I'm not sure if I wanted to be Spider-Man because of the catchy theme song, his cool “spidey-sense,” his ability to climb walls, or his ability to web sling throughout the city. Whatever the reason, I identified with him. Spider-Man is still my favorite superhero today, but my adult admiration stems from my personal identification with his plight.

Believe it or not, the transformation of Peter Parker into Spider-Man is very similar to my own. In the comic books, Peter Parker became Spider-Man only after a family tragedy: by choosing not to use his powers, he inadvertently caused the death of his uncle Ben.

My metamorphosis from Dr. Columbus Batiste, board-certified interventional cardiologist, to Columbus Batiste, the “Healthy Heart Doc,” was equally traumatic. For years, I practiced medicine the way I had been trained. I focused primarily on the use of medications and procedures to treat disease states. Lifestyle intervention was an obligatory afterthought, and not a form of treatment.

## The Heartbreak of Losing My Father

Being a product of this educational and belief system, I used the same methods when it came to my father. I encouraged him to use more and more medications and, as a result, watched him wither away. Not once did I, or the physicians who cared for him, address what I now know to have been the root cause: *poor nutrition*.

My father's health declined progressively during years of *medicating the symptoms* of poor nutrition instead of *correcting the root cause*. In 2010, my mother, siblings, and I watched him take his last breath. I was devastated. I had let him down when he needed me the most. All the words and gifts of gratitude I previously received from patients for “saving” their lives seemed to mock me.

## Grief Becomes Action

Like Peter Parker, my grief turned to action—not against my dad's physician's but against his disease. I began to research and arm myself with knowledge of nutrition. Backed by the scientific research in *Reversing Heart Disease* (Dean Ornish), *The China Study* (T. Colin Campbell), *Eat to Live* (Joel Fuhrman) and *Prevent and Reverse Heart Disease* (Caldwell Esselstyn), I was ready to fight the good fight. I also educated myself on stress reduction and trained myself in the ancient art of behavioral modification. I swore not to allow my father's death to be in vain.

During my life-changing transformation from traditional cardiologist to empowered Healthy Heart Doc, I realized that with great power comes great responsibility. I have changed my approach in the war against heart disease and its allies (diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol, and obesity) by opting to battle with “forks over stents.”

## Where I Am Now

By becoming a plant-based doctor and adopting this lifestyle, my work has become rewarding and has given me purpose (and dare I say, superpower!). I'm always so excited when I hear a story of how a person's life was changed by going plant-based.

I helped develop an Integrative Cardiovascular Disease program at Kaiser, which includes plant-based nutrition. I also created a “green” homework assignment for clinic and coronary artery bypass patients that includes the *Forks Over Knives* documentary and supporting books. Now, I am often gratified to hear physicians who were previously opposed to this diet tell me that they give their patients my “homework.”