



From Heart Attack to Healthy Heart in Two Years With No Meds

By Tim Tribiano, PhD
February 17 2016

April 30th, 2012, was like any other Monday. I had just had a great weekend with my wife and toddler son. I am a psychologist in private practice and spend every day in my office working with people seeking relief from emotional suffering and pursuing personal growth. Life was good by most standards. I had a new and growing family, I loved my work, and I only experienced a mild degree of stress at times. I had just had a physical three weeks earlier, and had slightly elevated total cholesterol at 170 and LDL at 105. Previously, my total cholesterol had been significantly higher, so I thought I was doing better. I had lost 30 pounds in the previous year, felt pretty well, and thought I was healthy. I ate the standard American diet with occasional ice cream and peanut butter binges.

A Crushing Pain in My Chest ... Which I Mistook for Acid Reflux

At 3:30 in the afternoon, while I was sitting with a patient, a burning sensation began in the center of my chest. Within five minutes, it was a crushing pain in my chest, down both arms, and into my jaw. In a moment of extraordinary denial, I convinced myself I was having a horrible episode of reflux. I proceeded to take some medication for that. I also took eight baby aspirin, in the “unlikely” event that I was having a heart attack. The pain was 90 percent gone in thirty minutes. I finished my day, went home, and had dinner. My wife urged me to contact my doctor since I was still clammy and had mild discomfort in my chest. I finally did and was encouraged by him to go to the emergency room. I drove myself there at 10 p.m. and was told I had an abnormal EKG with elevated troponin levels. In short, I was having a heart attack. This was no ordinary Monday!

My angiogram findings revealed 40 to 50 percent stenosis in my right coronary artery and 20 to 30 percent stenosis in my left anterior descending artery. Fortunately, my heart did not suffer any damage and a stent was not needed. While in the hospital, I researched heart disease treatments and quickly became aware of [Dr. Caldwell Esselstyn](#), a pioneer in treating heart disease with diet and the director of the cardiovascular prevention and reversal program at the Cleveland Clinic. By the time I was discharged from the hospital, I had finished his book, [Prevent and Reverse Heart Disease](#), and it was clear to me what I needed to do. I knew that

our lives would never be the same. For me, the easy part was eating a whole-food, plant-based (WFPB) diet. I loved the food and was convinced by the evidence that it was curative. The hard part was for my wonderful wife, who was willing to completely scrap or heavily modify every recipe she has ever made for our family and learn an entirely new menu and way of cooking. The learning curve was steep and she rose to the occasion. She became an extraordinary WFPB chef in the process and also follows the diet pretty closely herself.

After I left the hospital, I made contact with Dr. Esselstyn. He has been so kind and supportive and has even contacted me by phone on several occasions to answer questions and offer encouragement and support. [Forks Over Knives](#) was also a great source of inspiration to me as I moved through this process.

Post-Heart Attack

Soon after my heart attack, I had a very detailed lipid panel which showed a significant elevation in Lipoprotein(a), suggesting that my heart disease had a hereditary component. That elevation has remained high in my lipid panel and had no effect in undermining my progress.

Twenty-seven months after my heart attack, my primary care physician (Dr. Miguel Trevino) and my cardiologist (Dr. Ronald Walsh) ordered a CT of my coronary arteries to evaluate my progress. They were both very supportive and played an integral role in caring for me in my recovery. We had been monitoring my lipids every three to four months and I had consistently achieved total cholesterol readings from 90 to 110 and LDL from 48 to 55 without statins. My weight has been stable at 172 pounds, almost exactly my weight in high school. The findings of this latest CT scan were startling. There was no evidence of stenosis in my arteries. My right coronary artery (RCA) and left anterior descending artery (LAD) were 100 percent open. In short, my disease had completely reversed in just over two years. My cardiologist, Dr. Walsh, was amazed and essentially told me that I could return for a follow-up a year later if I “wanted to brag.”

What has been most compelling to me, a medical professional, was the effectiveness of using a whole-

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food, plant-based diet to reverse my "hereditary" heart disease. My success in reversing this disease is proof-positive that, in the words of Dr Esselstyn, heart disease is a "food borne illness that need not ever exist or ever progress..."

