



From Recreational Athlete to International Ultra-Athlete on a Plant-Based Diet

By Karen Brown
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For about 30 years, I dreamed of finishing the Ironman World Championship in Kona, Hawaii. Once I decided to actually do it, I knew I had to step up my training and performance. I had been doing triathlons recreationally for some time, but the Ironman World Championship (140.6-mile triathlon) is not for the amateur athlete. I hired a coach, who suggested I try a plant-based diet. I was never overweight since I was always active, but I did struggle with eating too much sugar, fat, processed foods, and alcohol—the foundations of the standard American diet. Although I was fit, my diet struggles diminished my day-to-day athletic performance.

Since I was going “all-in” to achieve my lifelong dream, I decided to try the plant-based diet and the green smoothies with which my coach had found so much success. I jumped in with vigor and my body seemed to like it. Within two weeks, I completely lost my appetite for chicken. Two weeks after that, I lost my taste for other meats. My new way of eating also helped me beat my cravings for sugar and alcohol. The more I stayed on the regimen, the better I felt.

The leaner my body became, the more efficient I became. I felt lighter when I ran, swam, and biked. My mental function was clearer, my memory seemed better, my sleep quality was better, and I had energy to burn. Overall, I felt better than I had in my entire life! Even when I came across professional or personal obstacles, my mental state was so positive that I immediately focused on the possibilities for success instead of the possibilities for failure.

I adopted a [plant-based diet](#) in 2011 and there is no doubt that it helped me realize my lifelong dream of competing in the Ironman World Championship in 2012. Since then, I've continued to run ultra-races and triathlons including the 2014 Ultraman World Champion (6.2-mile swim, 261.4-bike ride, 52.4-mile double-marathon) and the 2015 Ultra520k Canada (323-mile, 3-day triathlon). I am headed to South Africa at the end of this month to run the Comrades Marathon (56-mile run), the largest and oldest ultra-race in the world.

Achieving my Ironman dream was the gateway to even bigger, better things. Besides continuing to compete as an ultra-athlete, I've since become an author,

international speaker, and personal achievement coach. Through all these things, I want to help others find and realize their own true potential.