



Post Heart Attack, Living It Up at 84 on a Plant-Based Diet

By Jerry Hunter Nissen
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At 75, Jerry Hunter Nissen didn't realize he had heart disease—until he suffered a heart attack. Wanting to avoid surgery and prolonged medication use, he looked into improving his cardiac health through diet.

In May 2010, as a 75-year-old American living in Chiang Mai, Thailand, every day I swam more than 2 kilometers and ate what I considered a healthy diet. I ate some fish and chicken but no red meat.

When swimming on a Friday, I didn't feel too well, so I cut my swim short. On Saturday, swimming didn't feel invigorating, so I cut it short again. On Sunday, I swam one lap and felt terrible, so I went to my condo and laid down. That felt horrible. I called my business partner for some help. He took one look at me and rushed me to the hospital. While checking in, as I sat in a wheelchair, my heart stopped: I died.

After some time, I was resuscitated and rushed to the cardiology intensive care unit. After some recovery, my cardiologist wanted to put in a stent. I refused the stent and told my cardiologist that I did not want to take a bunch of high-powered meds and statins with potentially harmful side effects.

Studying Up

I began to research alternatives. I found Dean Ornish, MD, and purchased his book *Dr. Dean Ornish's Program for Reversing Heart Disease*. Then I discovered Caldwell Esselstyn, MD, and John McDougall, MD.

I continued to spend around a third of my time scanning the internet for guidance on fighting heart disease without medication. I compiled more than 40 pages of notes on nutrition. I went whole-food, plant-based, and within six months, I discontinued all medications.

Cruising in Good Health

Today I am a devoted whole-food, plant-based guy, following the recommendations of Dr. Esselstyn. Unfortunately, my "Essy diet" often keeps me away from most restaurants and dining out with friends. Still, I am happy this way. I lead an active life at 84, riding my motorcycle into the northern mountains of Thailand,

regularly walking and swimming (though no longer 2 kilometers daily).

Now my blood lipids are fine and my blood pressure is around 118/60. I have tracked my blood lipids about every three months since 2010, and I have demonstrated for myself, clearly, that I can elevate and decrease my key blood lipids by changing my diet—truly amazing.

Studying nutrition has become a personal hobby. I study the publications and presentations of Esselstyn; McDougall; T. Colin Campbell, PhD; Neal Barnard, MD; Michael Klaper, MD; and others. Cooking is a favorite pastime. Kale and broccoli are my two predominant foods. I use absolutely no oil: Yes, I can [stir fry without oil](#).

I encourage others to adopt a plant-based lifestyle, but I do so in a very low-key way. I believe that people should eat and drink and exercise as they choose. So I don't preach, but I share my experience and frequently share blogs and videos of my medical coaches.

Ready to get started? Check out [Forks Meal Planner](#), FOK's easy weekly meal-planning tool to keep you on a healthy plant-based path.