

## Congratulations to Another Star McDougaller

### Star McDougaller: Donna Byrnes

“Conquering my weight issues after 40 years”

Oh, how I dreaded sitting for this “before” picture, a family photo taken in January 2007. It wasn’t just the weight issue, but the overall path my life was taking. Each morning, after a bad night’s sleep, I would drag myself out of bed to survey what was hurting that day. My list of problems seemed endless. I would often wonder to myself, “Why do I feel so old when I am only in my forties?”

When I look back over my life now, I find the answers to this question in many different places and times. While growing up in the suburbs of New York City, the relationship between health and diet was never explored. I was raised on the typical American diet of meat and potatoes, and processed foods like Wonder Bread, instant potatoes and rice, and cold cuts. I was overweight, constipated and was developing arthritis even before I reached adulthood.



A dreaded family photo  
taken in January 2007

As a teenager I started down the road of yo-yo dieting. I would experiment with every new fad that came along: high-protein, low-carb, food combining, low-fat, no sugar, no meat, etc. Throughout my twenties and thirties, I continued the struggle to keep my weight down, but nothing ever seemed to stick. It’s exhausting to even think about the endless frustration I encountered during those days.

In my forties, however, things took a turn for the worse, not only with my weight but with my overall health. My problems grew like a fast-rolling snowball, and eventually everything began to hurt. I had sharp pains in my toes and arthritis in my knees; my hips ached while I lay in bed; I developed indigestion and gallbladder issues; I had headaches, hot flashes and mood swings; and to top it all off, I was diagnosed with costochondritis (a condition that causes chest pain due to inflammation of the cartilage and bones in the chest wall). My health issues—and my body—just kept getting bigger and bigger.

I had always been convinced that food was the key to unlocking my problems, but since I had never found a way of eating that made me feel better over a long period, I turned to several doctors. But they didn’t equate my issues with the quality of my diet; their answer was always to eat less to lose the weight. They would not discuss diet and I would not discuss medications (I knew that taking a bunch of pills for the rest of my life was not the answer). At this point I felt like a physical wreck, and emotionally I was scared, distraught and unhappy. So I began searching for a solution on my own.

## Finding my own way

My search first led me to try acupuncture and herbs, but they worked only to a varying degree of success. I came to understand later that without changing the primary cause of my problems—my diet—their help would be limited. I first heard about Dr. McDougall in a book written by John Robbins. I later read *The China Study* by T. Colin Campbell and Dr. McDougall's name was mentioned again. From here I went online and discovered the McDougall website—oh happy days! This discovery literally changed my life. Dr. McDougall didn't have a diet to lose weight but instead offered better health through eating a diet of plant-based, low-fat whole foods. As I read through the website, I remember thinking, "I like potatoes, rice, pasta, vegetables and fruit—I can do this!"



Zippering through the tree-top canopies of Costa Rica

The first things I gave up were meat and alcohol; these were easiest for me. Then I let go of the dairy, which was a little harder, and then the added oil. My body started to respond to my dietary changes immediately. Nagging problems began slipping away and gradually I was able to do more and more. Finally, my good health was starting to return. I was now having whole days that were pain-free. With each change came greater health, happiness and energy.

I kept my meals fairly simple: starches, fruits and veggies. I had to add breakfast to my daily routine, which was a big adjustment for me. I started with smoothies every morning then gradually added whole foods. Lunches and dinners were easier; I basically ate the same dishes I used to but just without the meat, dairy and added oil.

After so many years, my digestive system finally began to function correctly. I also started sleeping peacefully through the night, and my headaches and hot flashes disappeared. I stopped having gallbladder attacks, and my costochondritis even cleared up.

The hardest part of changing my diet was being different. So much of life is centered around food. While I am the only one I know that eats this type of diet (aside from the people I have met on the McDougall Costa Rica adventures and on the McDougall discussion board), I was fortunate to have the support of my family and friends.

Since my significant other, Kevin, is so supportive, I am able to keep foods I don't want to be tempted by out of the house. Kevin eats what I eat when we are at home. But if he does buy something that I don't eat, he is kind enough to keep it out of my sight. Family and friends go out of their way to prepare dishes I can eat when I visit. Everyone is amazed by the results and is very happy for me.

Eating out has been curtailed, but I have developed a relationship with some of the restaurants that I like. I no longer look at the menu, but instead just order what I want. In some cases it has become as easy as saying, "Please tell the chef Donna is here and would like him/her to make her something." I have yet to be disappointed with what they have come up with. The biggest help has been not to let myself get hungry if I am away from home. If I know I'm going somewhere where the choices will be limited, I make sure to eat before I leave home.

I also started to exercise at the same time I changed my diet, so each day brings more joy as I literally hop out of bed refreshed, excited and well-rested. When I'm at home I play tennis and take three-mile walks on the beach. Last February I was ziplining through the tree-top canopies of Costa Rica, and last month I was hiking along the Oregon Coast. Next up: hiking and rafting through the



Grand Canyon.

I just keep putting one foot in front of the other. Changing my diet and lifestyle was not something I did overnight, but it does get easier as you go along—and it is so worth it. After decades of struggling, I can't believe how trim I am and how good I feel. I am turning 50 in October and am actually looking forward to my next decade.

The McDougall Program has been a blessing to me. I have lost 77 pounds and look forward to each new day. It is not about buying expensive foods, taking pills, measuring portions, or eating prepared foods—it's about being healthy and happy.

Donna Byrnes  
Amelia Island, Florida  
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It's been a long time since I liked any pictures of myself. Now I can't pick.

#### Dr. McDougall's Comments

Donna's life changing experience is not unique—the same happens for everyone who makes similar dietary exchanges. So, why doesn't everyone eat this way? Why have the scientific truths of a plant-food-based diet struggled to reach the public's attention? Why do we continue to hear about the benefits of low-carbohydrate diets for weight loss, and the absolute necessity of meat for protein and dairy for calcium? Why are there so many commercials on TV advertising prescription medications?

Businesses that currently dominate the marketplace have figured out that if they keep the public confused, then consumers will not change their buying habits, and they can keep selling us their poisons. And there is no one to stop them. Governments should be protecting the public, but they are steadfast pro-business. The few lone voices in the wilderness are drowned out by billions of dollars spent on advertising and public relations, and the industry-sponsored "scientific" research that supports the status quo. I see no immediate change in sight, short of a revolution.

All revolutions start with a few people who learn the truth and are willing to speak up. Donna knows the truth—that's why she has shared her story—and so should you: know the truth and share it with others. Tell your friends, family, doctors, lawyers, and politicians. Don't be shy.

Tell them that the run-away best-selling drugs currently popular for treating chronic diseases, such as obesity, type-2 diabetes, atherosclerosis, arthritis, and multiple sclerosis (to name a few common problems) are practically useless, highly toxic, and unaffordable. Tell them that nearly every person over the age of 30 living in western countries is sick, and the reason is that they are eating the wrong foods—meat, dairy, and other assorted garbage. No longer can these two basic truths be kept secret.

Today, less than .0001% of the world's people know the truth about diet. I mean really know the truth: from time spent living on a plant-food-based diet and reaping the benefits. Fortunately, the numbers are growing. What if 1% of people become informed? Or 15% begin eating healthy and living drug-free? We—you and I working together in growing numbers—will save the world.

It is not enough to just save yourself and your family (which I encourage you all to do). Billions of people are suffering needlessly and the planet is in serious trouble, as a direct result of for-profit lies perpetuated about proper human nutrition by vested commercial interests . Those of us who know better and who are able to take action, have the responsibility to take action. Act now.