

Congratulations to Another Star McDougaller

Star McDougaller: Meredith Fishman—Running Marathons after Debilitating Rheumatoid Arthritis

Dr. McDougall's Comments:

Why do doctors continue to prescribe toxic, expensive, and proven-ineffective medications for arthritis when diet is such a simple answer? Maybe a recent experience of mine will help you understand, not the answer to, but the gravity of, the problem. During the last Advanced Study Weekend of February 2010 Nortin Hadler, MD, a professor and an allergist, immunologist, internist, and rheumatologist (arthritis specialist) from the University of North Carolina School of Medicine, spoke to our group. (You can watch his lectures on the Internet [broadcast](#) or listen to his [podcasts](#), I have great respect for Dr. Hadler's knowledge and willingness to write and speak out about the harms and lack of benefits from heart surgery (bypass and angioplasty) and early detection testing (PSA and mammograms). I invited him expressly so that you could hear someone else besides me condemn these common medical practices—and he was as outspoken about these malpractices as I have ever been.

We had lunch together on the Friday afternoon of the first day of the conference. Even though I tried to avoid the subject for political reasons, our conversation eventually did get around to diet and arthritis. Dr. Hadler clearly expressed his belief

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I am a 40 year-old female competitive marathon runner, 5 feet 3 inches tall, weighing 110 pounds, and I am extremely athletic and fit. I do an intensive strength-training program every morning and then go back to the gym at lunchtime to do an hour of "cardio." In my late 30's I was an exceptionally gifted long distance runner and began to train very hard to qualify for the 2012 Olympic Trials. I was still a long way off, but that was the goal I lived for.



This all changed in December of 2008, the day after I qualified for the prestigious Boston Marathon. I had been training 3 times a day for almost a year when I was struck down with painful arthritis. High as a kite on my success and achievement, I started limping the next day. My orthopedic doctor thought I had suffered from a simple injury. But this one event soon became one of many seemingly endless "injuries," including several neuromas in both feet, and numerous types of tendonitis and joint inflammation, which lasted throughout 2009. Even though I was forced to take many months

off from running, I still kept getting "injured." A short time later, I developed inflammation in my jaw, my right hand, and elbow. I practically lived in my orthopedist's office, getting one cortisone shot after another every few weeks in different joints and living on the anti-inflammatory medication, diclofenac (Voltaren, Cataflam), for almost a year.

My orthopedist finally told me, "Look, this is beyond bad luck, I think you need to get tested for autoimmune diseases, like rheumatoid arthritis and lupus, or maybe gout. I was absolutely shocked. I had heard of these, but I didn't think they happened to healthy, active people like me. I dismissed his comments as ludi

crous, but after another couple of months, because of my progressive disability, I could no longer ignore him. I felt very depressed. I was crippled with what three doctors eventually told me was rheumatoid arthritis.

Bowel Problems and More

At about the same time my joints were failing me my digestive system started going absolutely hay-wire. For years I had suffered from IBS (irritable bowel syndrome) on and off. Three years ago, my gastroenterologist did an endoscopy and diagnosed me with acid reflux, followed by a treatment with a proton pump inhibitor, Protonix, for the next three years. Because of the side effects from the diclofenac, I got to the point where I couldn't eat any longer; my stomach and esophagus were painfully inflamed. I had terrible nausea, unbearable stomach cramps, and constant bloating. I felt terrible. While all of this was going on, I was eating a diet heavy in dairy, meat, and processed foods, which I then thought were healthy. I gained six pounds. I was also taking about 30 vitamins and other supplements daily. How could I be so sick?



My orthopedist begged me to see a rheumatologist. Before making that appointment I went on the Internet to look up the side effects of all the prescription drugs that this doctor might prescribe for me. I was absolutely horrified. I actually started to cry and instantly felt that there was no way on this earth I was going to take any of these. The side effects were like taking cancer chemotherapy and I quickly realized that I would have at least 6 grave new problems on top of all the other stuff going on. Any medication that lists leukemia as a possible side effect should not be called a treatment—it should be called a death sentence. I decided then and there that I would die slowly and on my own terms.

Discovering Foods that Cause Autoimmunity

My next effort to save myself was to go to Amazon.com and type in "Living with RA." All of the books said the same thing: diet and food allergies/leaky gut syndrome/candida and prescription meds (especially the ones I was taking) can cause RA and other autoimmune diseases. Fortunately, these books started me looking at my diet. I went off Protonix, diclofenac and most of my supplements cold turkey that day. Next, I made an appointment with an immunologist.

The immunologist tested me for everything under the sun via blood, stool, and food allergy testing. I was also tested for several autoimmune disorders. The diagnosis was an allergy to eggs (whites and yolks), which was likely caused by all the medications I was taking. Beginning December 1, 2009, I removed all eggs and egg products from my life. I soon realized on my own that dairy was also a problem. That's when I found Dr. McDougall and became a healthy vegan. Within a day or so, my symptoms started to improve and have

kept improving over weeks, and now months.

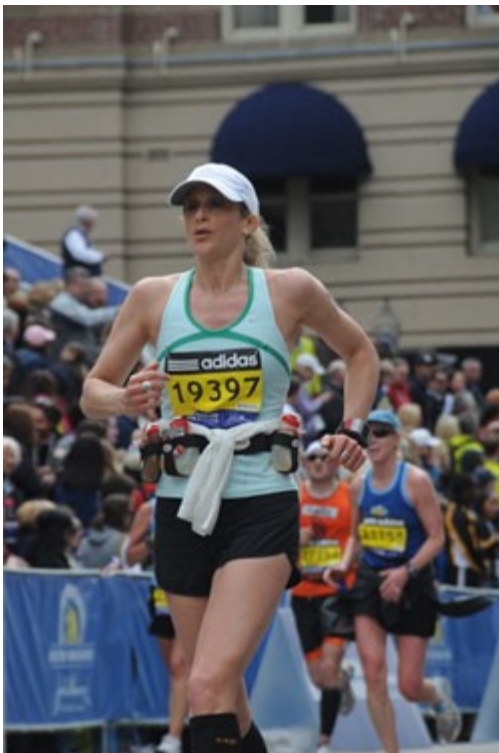
My Whole Life Has Improved

My bowel movements are now the best I've ever had. Looking back, I actually don't think I had had a normal BM since I was a baby. My stomach and intestines are completely comfortable now. Instead of having constant muscle soreness from the workouts, at worst, I now have only mild fatigue in my muscles after a hard workout. For the past several years, I would wake up multiple times in the middle of the night tossing and turning and then get up exhausted the next day. I put that down to age, too. Now I sleep like a baby and wake up feeling refreshed, it's miraculous!

My cholesterol had remained at about 220 mg/dL for the past seven years, with my "good" cholesterol being very high, so none of my doctors ever batted an eyelid. In February of 2010, after my diet change, my cholesterol reading was 160 mg/dL.

Another thing that amazes me is how little I need to eat now. I used to need to eat massive amounts of food each day and now I need so much less. I think this is because my body is now getting real food with real nutrients. As soon as I went off the meds and stopped eating eggs and dairy, I lost the six pounds I had gained with the RA. It literally shed within two weeks. I think most of the excess weight was from the bloating and inflammation I had suffered with the RA.

Some of My Practical Steps



On beginning my new diet, I went through my pantry and removed 90% of the food. Then I went on a few big shopping trips to Whole Foods and bought only vegan items. I pored over vegan recipes, writing down all the recurring ingredients in order to make a shopping list to restock my pantry. I now think a week in advance about what I want to eat in order to have fresh foods available. Sunday evening is my big cooking time. Every week I make a vegetable soup (with just water, vegetables, a few spices, and quinoa or brown rice). This lasts me for the week. I eat the soup every day with my lunch and use the extra broth to cook rice and in any recipe that calls for broth. I bake a vegan pasta dish and eat that also a few times during the week. I prepare my own dressings, sauces, and granola. I take all my own food to work every day. When I leave home for more than a few hours, I bring an apple, smoothie, or some snacks along.

My Running Is Back On Track

In January 2010, after three weeks without any meat and dairy products I was able to start running again. This was after 13 months of pain and disability! I am now off of all my medications. I ran the elite Boston Marathon on April 19, 2010 with no pain nor injury, whatsoever. I am now training for a half marathon in August and a full marathon in October. I may never be able

to qualify for the Olympic Trials, but I am going to keep trying for 2016. The most important thing is that I am now completely free of joint inflammation and pain—and I can run!

Adopting a vegan diet has been enlightening and has changed my whole life for the good. I can't look at Western foods the same, ever again. They repulse me. When I see the meat and dairy products now, I see illness, pain, and suffering. I also think of the suffering animals and our failing environment. My involuntary internal reactions make it easy for me to abstain.

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that there is no connection.

I asked him to provide me with a single scientific article that supported his viewpoint. He could not.

During the 3-day conference three people, including Meredith Fishman, who had each cured themselves of inflammatory arthritis by changing to the McDougall diet, confronted Dr. Hadler with their remarkable stories (I played no role in these encounters). Afterwards, each of them separately told me about their experience. They explained that his response to their story of healing was pleasant, but each was left with the feeling that the doctor had no real interest in learning more about their food-induced miracle and did not really believe his or her story.

At the end of the conference I gave Dr. Hadler more than 30 pages of materials that I had written which included 28 letters and research studies published in the world's most respected scientific/medical journals showing how a diet like mine could dramatically improve and cure people with inflammatory [arthritis](#). (Remember: there are no scientific papers published that show that diets like mine fail to benefit inflammatory arthritis.) In response to my gesture to share valuable knowledge, he told me he was too busy writing his own articles to read what I had written. I also suggested that as one of the world's most respected arthritis doctors he should conduct research that would either prove or disprove my claims. I do not expect any further conversations with Dr. Hadler on this matter.

As demonstrated by the Hadler experience, change will never come from confronting the misinformation held by health professionals by using undeniable scientific evidence and concrete patient examples. I believe the only hope is for consumers to become informed about the real costs, hazards, and ineffectiveness of current drug therapies and to learn how simple it is to prevent and cure most of these inflammatory forms of arthritis with a healthy diet, just like Meredith Fishman and many of my other patients have done. Then to spread the truth by example and by word of mouth.