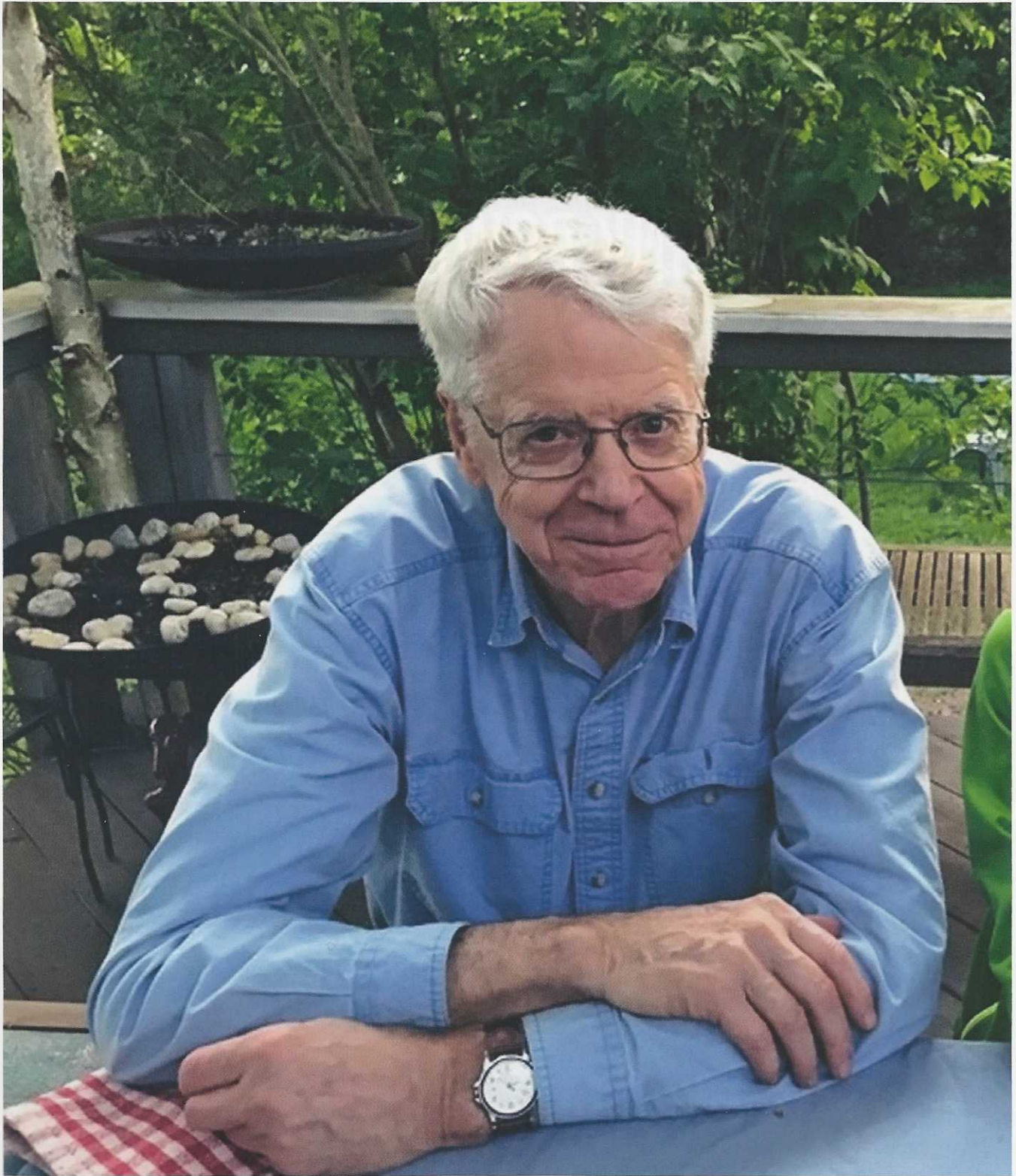


# The Esselstyn Family Motto: Your Health Is Truly in Your Hands

By Carole Audet



Caldwell B. Esselstyn, Jr., M.D. graduated from Yale University with a B.A. and went on to receive his M.D. from Western Reserve University. He won an Olympic Gold Medal in Rowing in 1956, a Bronze Star as an army surgeon in Vietnam in 1968, and was the first recipient of the Benjamin Spock Award for compassion in medicine in 2005, likely due to his mantra: Don't abandon patients.

He has published more than 160 scientific papers, written a bestselling book, and currently directs the cardiovascular disease prevention and reversal program at Cleveland Clinic Wellness Institute.

He has made a career of championing the benefits of a whole foods plant-based diet, and his entire family—which includes his wife, four kids, their spouses, and ten grandchildren—all enjoy plant-powered health.

Dr. Esselstyn's journey into studying and applying a whole foods plant-based diet began when he was chairman of the Breast Cancer Task Force. "By 1979, 1980, I was becoming increasingly disillusioned with the fact that no matter how many women I was doing breast surgery on, I was doing absolutely nothing for the next unsuspecting victim. This led to a bit of global research, and it was quite striking to find that there were multiple cultures where breast cancer rates were 30 and 40 times less frequent than in the United States," he explains.

He also reviewed the rates of prostate cancer globally, and what he discovered was startling: In Japan in 1958, there were only 18 proven deaths from prostate cancer.

At around this time, he began to wonder if persuading people to eat a particular diet could help their heart disease, because his research showed that many cultures were virtually devoid of cardiovascular issues. As an added benefit, he considered that this way of eating would also reduce the chances of patients getting the forms of cancer that are all too common in North America, such as breast, prostate, colon, and pancreatic cancers.

Armed with this information, he knew that it wouldn't be simply a matter of telling people to eat plant-based, so he launched a small study in 1985 with 24 patients who had serious heart disease.

"They had failed their first or second bypass. They had failed their first or second angioplasty. They were too sick for these procedures or they had refused. And five were told by their expert cardiologist they wouldn't live out the year. It was really quite striking how we began to suddenly see that it was going to work, that not only could these people who were so sick halt a progression of their disease, we often saw striking examples of disease reversal," reflects Esselstyn.

In order to get these patients to stick to what is a fairly strict way of eating, Esselstyn used the same mantra he had been using with his breast cancer patients, something he learned from a colleague: Don't abandon your patients.

"For the first five years with this group, I saw every one of those patients every two weeks in my office; we went over every morsel of food, checked their weight, blood pressure, and cholesterol."

Once Esselstyn retired from surgery, the Cleveland Clinic rehired him in their wellness institute because the results achieved by those original patients were life-saving. Today, he conducts seminars for 18 to 20 people at a time where participants learn how their disease was created, and why the solution of a whole foods plant-based diet will help them reverse it. Esselstyn treats these seminar attendants similar to how he treats patients: He gives them his time by calling each one before the seminar so he knows their story and they can ask him questions.

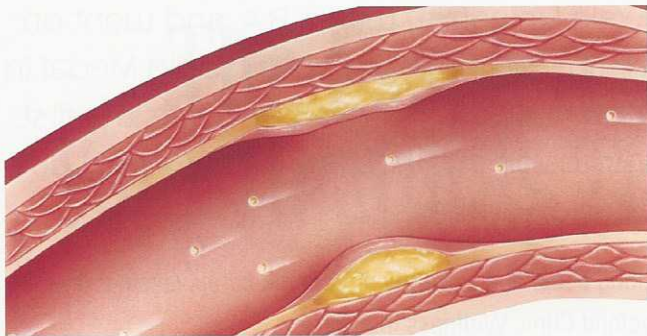
The rate of adhering to the diet, based on over 200 patients, is 89.3 percent. Esselstyn is proud of this figure and he attributes this level of success to the fact that he clearly and explicitly defines the cause of their heart disease. "If you make cardiovascular disease some great mysterious illness, that's just not going to stick with people."

He explains to his patients about the "delicate innermost lining of the artery called the endothelium" and that it's "responsible for making this magic molecule of gas, nitric oxide."

Why exactly is it magic? Because it protects our blood vessels."

Nitric oxide keeps all of the cellular elements within our bloodstream flowing smoothly. It's also the strongest blood vessel dilator in the body, and nitric oxide will protect the wall of the artery from becoming thickened, stiff or inflamed, which protects us from getting high blood pressure. The absolute key is a safe and normal amount of nitric oxide protects us from ever developing any blockages or plaque," he explains.

Those who suffer from cardiovascular disease have limited the endothelial cells' ability to make nitric oxide. "But the



Vascular atherosclerosis showing a cutaway view of accumulated plaque in an afflicted blood vessel. This condition is avoidable and potentially reversible with a plant-based diet.

good news is this is not a malignancy. This is a completely benign food-borne illness. Once patients understand that never again are they to pass through their lips a single morsel of any food that is going to further destroy an already train wreck endothelium, then the endothelium begins to recover. It makes enough nitric oxide so that we can halt disease progression and we often see significant elements of disease reversal.”

What foods should never again pass through your lips? Meat, fish, fowl, dairy, eggs, oil of any kind. Sugary foods and drinks are also off the table. Esselstyn recommends that his patients avoid nuts and nut butters, avocados, and caffeinated coffee.

“What are you going to eat? You're going to eat all these marvelous whole grains, 101 different types of legumes, lentils and beans, all these marvelous red, yellow and green leafy vegetables, white potatoes, sweet potatoes and fruit.”

Dr. Esselstyn then proceeds to demonstrate his sharp memory by listing the more than 20 vegetables that he recommends we partake in at will.

Ann has been by her husband's side helping him from the beginning. During the last hour or so of his seminars, Ann talks about how to work with plant foods, what to do at restaurants and while travelling, so that each person is prepared to quickly adopt this lifestyle. In fact, all the recipes shared in Part Two of *Prevent and Reverse Heart Disease* are Ann's creations. “I never could have gotten any of this off the ground without this wonderful lady,” says Esselstyn.

Ann and their daughter Jane published *The Prevent and Reverse Heart Disease Cookbook* in 2014. Their second cookbook together will be released in the summer of 2022.

When asked about cooking without oil, Jane quickly responds, “Just don't use it, period. End of sentence. If you're cooking without oil, you're not going to have the same dish you had with oil, so searing things is not happening. You're cooking an onion and it's going to be brown and caramelized and it's going to taste like an onion, not an onion with oil.”

Esselstyn is optimistic about the future of medicine, but he stresses that a radical shift will only happen one way. “A seismic revolution in health will never come about from the invention of another pill or procedure or operation. But it will come about when we in the profession have the will and the grit and the determination to share with the patient the lifestyle, and most specifically the nutritional literacy that will empower them as the locus of control to halt and reverse chronic illness.”

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Caldwell B. Esselstyn, Jr., M.D.

He's talking about all forms of illness. “When you get patients with heart disease to start eating plant-based nutrition, heart disease, gone; diabetes and hypertension, gone; the risk of a stroke and nonvascular dementia, gone; Crohn's disease, gone; ulcerative colitis, gone; rheumatoid arthritis, gone; multiple sclerosis, allergies and asthma—the list goes on and on and on, and it's so powerful and so profound. As a matter of fact, it's so saturated with the dignity of simplicity that most physicians can't believe Brussels sprouts and broccoli are perhaps more powerful than any of the drugs they give.”

What keeps Esselstyn going is seeing patients regain control over their health simply by choosing a whole foods plant-based diet.

For those who are already eating plant-based, simply eliminate oil, sugar and salt to improve your health. ●

For more information and to register for Dr. Esselstyn's seminar, contact his secretary Jacqueline at 216-448-8556.

 @DrEsselstyn  Dr.Esselstyn

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