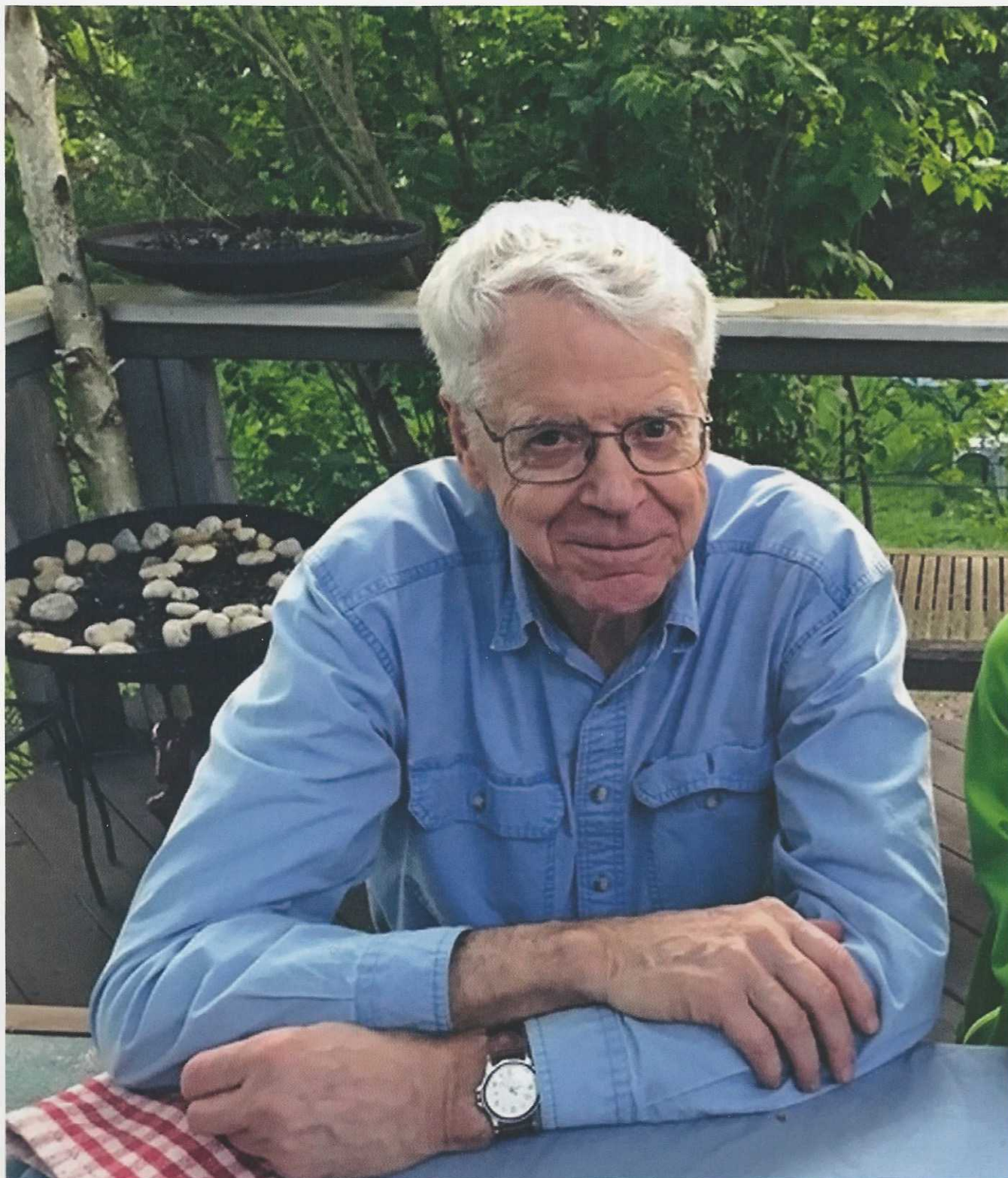


The Esselstyn Family Motto: Your Health Is Truly in Your Hands

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

