

I completed Senior Leader Sustainment's 'Healthy Eating Adventure' - Here's what I learned

By Curt Keester, Public Affairs, OPINION 06 December 2018



Healthy eating adventurers graduate Dec. 4, at the Delaney Field House after a 28 day plant based whole foods eating program.



The introduction of the Healthy Eating Adventure to the Carlisle Barracks included a "dinner of discovery" complete with a grilled Portobello bar, quinoa with apple and raisins, and pumpkin chia pudding for desert.



Healthy Eating Adventurers watch as Steve Wood, Chef at the Letort View Community Center, demonstrates proper knife handling techniques, and gives tips for meal and vegetable preparation at the Delaney Filed House, Nov. 13.

This is a continuing journal by a new recruit to the Healthy Eating Adventure in partnership with the Senior Leader Sustainment Program

WEEK SIX: Graduation, Tuesday, Dec. 4

The last evening of the six-week whole foods plant-based eating challenge, the final potluck dinner and the graduation of Carlisle Barracks' first Healthy Eating Adventure was Dec. 4 at the Delaney Field House. Participants met for one last evening of individual development, camaraderie and a sampling of healthy plant-based dishes.

The evening was less formal than the rest, as the end of the program was



Steve Wood, Chef at the Letort View Community Center, demonstrates proper knife handling techniques for vegetable preparation at the Delaney Filed House, Nov. 13.

now in sight. Before dinner, Dr. Liz shared the results of the group's lab tests, which, in most cases, showed a noticeable improvement and an LDL (low-density lipoproteins or "bad" cholesterol) and total cholesterol. One participant dropped their total cholesterol to 61 points.

Following dinner, Dr. Liz and the coaches awarded participants with their diplomas, and each graduate shared a short story of their experience over the past 28 days.

Here is what I learned from after my Healthy Eating Adventure:

1) It is cheaper than I thought: Before My Healthy Eating Adventure, I tended to avoid healthier choices at the grocery store because I believed them to be more expensive. I found, however, after the initial reorganization of my pantry; the costs leveled out, and I was consistently within my allotted food budget for the week. In fact, I found I was able to save money, because the foods I was buying tended to last longer, and I wasn't eating out as often.

2) It is not as time-consuming as I thought: We are all pressed for time. Before the challenge, I would often stop at a local fast food restaurant believing it saved me time in the evening. What I found, however, was that with a little preparation each evening, about 15 minutes, and on the weekend, maybe an hour or two, I always had meals ready for the next day and extra food on hand to snack on if I was hungry.

3) It is easier than I thought: Making the transition to plant-based whole foods proved to be easier than I imagined. After the first day and two visits to my local grocery store, I had converted my diet and modified my pantry. With a little preparation each evening, I was always ready to tackle the next day, and I was always full. I found I could eat as much and as often as I liked, and I lost weight. By the end of my adventure, I lost 14 pounds.

At the end of the evening, there was the promise of continued community support. Eating healthy is easier when you are a part of a community supports the lifestyle. Beyond the Healthy Eating Adventure community relationships developed between participants, coaches, and organizers. If any of the participants are need of support, they now have a network of like-minded people to contact.

Following my healthy eating adventure, I plan to continue to adhere to the plant-based whole food lifestyle, with an occasional eggs benedict breakfast. As when I adopted this type of diet before, I felt better. I slept better. I lost weight. And, as this is an anti-inflammatory diet, some of my



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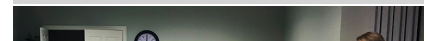
Healthy eating adventurer Joseph McCoy practices making a spring roll at third and final eat-and-learn potluck held at the Delaney Field House, Nov. 27.



One of the dishes made by coaches for the Oct. 30, potluck sampling that concluded the even's learning adventure.



Yeast flakes are your friend! Yeast flakes are a salt-free, sugar-free way to season any meal.



daily aches and pains decreased.

In a later interview, Brown said she hopes to offer some form of the Healthy Eating Adventure to the larger Carlisle Barracks community in February, and she hopes to plan a second session for Army War College students in April. Updates will be posted on armywarcollege.edu as they become available.



Dr. Elizabeth George offers Healthy Eating Adventurers advice and answers questions, Nov. 6, during the first of four eat-and-learn potluck dinners at the Delaney Field House.

WEEK FIVE: "It's a Wrap" food demo, Tuesday Nov. 27

The third and final eat-and-learn potluck was held at the Delaney Field House, Nov. 27. This time my team brought entrees. We again enjoyed our "meal as adventure" when each team offered to share personal experiences and successes from the holiday weekend. Perhaps most impressive was the story of one of our group who ran a 50-mile ultramarathon while maintaining the plant-based diet.



Healthy eating adventurers enjoyed a delicious and hardy meal at the third and final eat-and-learn potluck, held at the Delaney Field House, Nov. 27.

I tried a seitan and wild mushroom stew. If I didn't know better, I would have sworn the dish contained roast beef. It was delicious, hardy, and perfect for a crisp fall evening.

The highlight of the evening was the lesson that followed our dinner. ***Here is what I learned:***

It's a Wrap: I developed an allergy to seafood when I was 24 -- well before I was able to try sushi and, out of cross-contamination fears, I have never tried sushi. After dinner, Coach Patti Nitterhouse and Dr. Liz demonstrated not only how to make vegan sushi, but also vegan spring rolls. This was one of the best lessons of the adventure. It allows someone like me, who has a food allergy, to finally enjoy a meal I've wanted to try for years. I was not disappointed.

Thanksgiving

I am not going lie. I cheated big time on Thanksgiving! I had eggs, bacon and toast for breakfast. I enjoyed a large turkey dinner, stuffing, mashed potatoes, cream corn, olives, cranberry sauce and homemade pumpkin pie that afternoon. It was delicious, and I feel no shame. That night, however, I immediately went back to my Healthy Eating Adventure. I continued where

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I left off, and I did not gain a pound of weight by the end of the holiday weekend. I think that is a success.

WEEK FOUR: Food Prep Demo and handling the holidays, Tuesday Nov. 13

The second of three eat-and-learn potluck dinners was held at the Delaney Field House, Nov. 13, and again, each of the four teams brought a different type of dish. My team prepared soups this evening. I brought a pumpkin and red lentil soup. I thought it was both delicious and appropriate for the autumn season. Other Adventurers brought fruits, salads and entrees.

I tried an orange and beet dish that was amazing. Who knew oranges and beets could go together? Certainly not me. I tried an avocado and cocoa pudding/desert style dish that was delicious as well.

When we shared ideas and experiences over dinner, stories included both successes and setbacks. The tenacity of the group impressed me the most. Despite small setbacks, everyone has been extremely successful in transitioning to the whole foods plant-based diet.

Here's what we learned from Dr. Liz for the upcoming Thanksgiving holiday:

1) **Vegetable stock:** In the course of cooking plant-based meals, there are a lot of leftover vegetable parts, skins and stems. Instead of throwing these pieces out, place them in a storage container or plastic bag and freeze them. When enough have accumulated, put it in a pot on the stove, add water to cover and boil for 40 minutes. When you are done, drain the liquid into another container and freeze for later use. You can use what remains in the pot as compost for your yard. It really is a very "green" diet.

2) **Planning for the Holiday:** Thanksgiving is going to prove to be a challenge. Traditions run deep, and families are still adjusting to this new way of eating. Knowing this, it is important to have a plan in place. Know where you are going and what will be on the menu. if need be, and without insulting your host, bring your own dish. However, and most importantly, remember to be grateful and thankful. Time with family and friends is priceless.

Chef Steve Wood, Letort View Community Center, demonstrated proper knife handling techniques and vegetable preparation to the group. He answered questions and offered suggestions for best practices that come

from his years of experience in food preparation in the food industry.

WEEK THREE: Ask the Doctor, Tuesday, Nov. 6

Healthy Eating Adventurers met at the Delaney Field House, Nov. 6, for the first of three eat-and-learn potluck dinners. Coaches had assigned each of the four teams a type of dish to bring. For example, my team prepared salads. Other teams prepared soups, sandwiches and entrees. Together they presented a large sampling of various dishes for the group to try, enjoy, and note for later use. This community experience is a key point of taking part in this adventure together. Our collective experimentation in the kitchen and shared experiences at the potluck dinners helps increase the probability of transitioning successfully to a whole foods, plant-based lifestyle, we've been told.

As we dined, Dr. Liz talked to the group, offered advice and answered questions. ***Here is what we learned:***

- 1) **The importance of knowing your goals.** Obviously, setting goals is important, but I had never put this in the context of food or a lifestyle change before. Know why you are doing this, what are your obstacles and work to achieve and overcome them.
- 2) **Supplement your diet.** For the most part, this type of eating provides the nutrients required to sustain a healthy diet, but vitamin B12, which is found in animal-based foods, has to be supplemented. You might also supplement vitamin D3. Vitamin D comes from exposure to the sun, but due to the region we live in, most people here are vitamin D deficient.
- 3) **Eating out is a challenge.** It should come as no surprise that fast food is bad for you, but eating out is a part of our culture. Family dinners, social occasions, business lunches and date nights often revolve around dining out. This can require prior planning and flexibility on the part of plant-based eaters. Many restaurants have special menu items, others are willing to prepare plates to your requirements, and when in doubt, there is always soup and salad. It isn't always ideal, but, with some forethought you can make it work.

As the potluck concluded, my colleagues shared favorite leftovers to take home and enjoy throughout the rest of the week.

WEEK TWO: Kitchen makeover, Tuesday, Oct. 30

I haven't had meat or dairy since Tuesday, Oct. 30.

As I walked into the Delaney Field House for the second meeting of the Healthy Eating Adventure, I didn't want to be there. I had worked all day, I was ready to go home, and I wanted a pizza. Entering the field house, however, I smelled something delicious in one of the crockpots, and I saw images of desserts on the wall. My thoughts of pizza faded.

Previously to this evening's meeting, coaches assigned everyone into one of four teams. Each has two coaches and 14 members. Each coach will help a team work through the 28-day challenge, answer questions, provide guidance, and suggest recipes. I took a seat with my team and settled in to listen to Coach B. J. Reed as she walked us through how to make over our kitchens.

Reed is a plant-based health food coach, cookbook author and food photographer. She collaborates with the Healthy Eating Adventure and helps others lead a healthy eating lifestyle. Since 2010, she has sustained a "healthy eating lifestyle." Her presentation included tips, photos and a kitchen makeover video featuring Rip Esselstyn, the author of, "The Engine 2 Diet: The Texas Firefighter's 28-Day Save-Your-Life Plan that Lowers Cholesterol and Burns Away the Pounds," published in 2009 by Grand Central Life & Style.

Here's what I learned:

- 1) **It's a lifestyle change, and you will need to cook.** Not a problem, I cook all the time. I will need to learn new recipes, however.
- 2) **Eliminate meat, dairy and cooking oil from your diet. Reduce sugar, salt and processed foods.** I've eliminated meat and dairy, no problem. Processed foods are more difficult. Sugar, salt and oil are added to many foods we eat. The best I can do is reduce the amount I eat.
- 3) **Keep it simple at first.** I started with an easy routine. For breakfast, I have oatmeal. I have an apple and an orange for a morning snack. A hummus sandwich on whole wheat bread with lettuce is lunch, and I have an spring peas and edamame in the afternoon. For dinner, I add variety, for example black bean chili or butternut squash stuffed with brown rice.

The evening concluded with a potluck sampling of dishes made by our coaches. I'm not sure which dish I smelled as I entered the room earlier, because all the dishes tasted good. I did learn that **yeast flakes are my friend!** Yeast flakes, as I found out, are a salt-free, sugar-free way to season any meal.

SPECIAL FEATURE: In order to eat right, you have to shop right.

Brown and coach Larry Hayes led a guided tour through the commissary Sat. Oct. 27 for interested adventurers. The group strolled through the fresh produce, canned/packaged food and frozen food sections of the store. During the tour, the two offered healthy advice, shared personal experiences and suggestions for healthy choices.

I discovered fresh vegetable noodles made from zucchini, squash and sweet potatoes. We also discussed how to read labels on packaging. Perhaps my most important new knowledge is that sorbet is a healthy non-dairy alternative to ice cream.

WEEK ONE: Kick Off, Tuesday, Oct. 23

I'm skeptical going into this adventure. I've been around vegans most of my life. I even made the transition to a whole foods plant based diet once and, honestly, it's the healthiest I've ever felt. The group presenting tonight seems as gung ho as any I've encountered, and if you've ever been around vegans, you know what I mean. One thing stands out tonight however: the presenter is a family practice physician, a doctor.

Dr. Elizabeth George presented the evening's nutritional lecture on "The science behind whole foods plant-based eating," to 20 war college students and 36 family members at the Letort View Community Center Oct. 23. Capt. Kira Brown, Dunham Clinic Dietician, hosted the eat-and-learn experience to complement the Senior Leader Sustainment Program. She crafted the plan to introduce the Healthy Eating Adventure to Carlisle Barracks with a "dinner of discovery" complete with a grilled Portobello bar, quinoa with apple and raisins, and pumpkin chia pudding for desert.

There was no meat, and there was no dairy. For a carnivore, like myself, those are immediate red flags. I had decided before going into the evening however to approach it with an open mind, and **here is what I learned.**

The doctor's pitch/insights

"The Healthy Eating Adventure is a community based program," said George. "You'll be learning from people who learned this just like you're going to. It's people-to-people, so if I can do it, you can do it -- and the cool thing about it is, you can see the difference in 28 days."

This is very important to me. One thing I had experienced in my brief time on a whole foods plant based diet was that support matters. A transition this big will undoubtedly go better with a group of like-minded people to provide guidance, experience, and answer questions.

According to George, a whole foods plant-based diet can help sustain readiness by enhancing peak cognitive skills, strength and energy, and recovery time after physical exertion. This is a broad claim, but she provided examples from research that suggests a whole foods plant based diet can help to improve cholesterol, blood pressure, blood sugar, and help manage weight.

“The majority of chronic diseases are related to lifestyle, and they are preventable through a healthy lifestyle,” said George.

How vegan is vegan enough?

Carlisle participants in the Healthy Eating Adventure agree to give up animal products in their diet for 28 days. In cooperation with the Senior Leader Sustainment program, the participants will track their progress through lab work conducted at the beginning and end of the adventure. Health screenings will be available for spouses who enroll and take the challenge.

The food costs of this new way of eating were not covered in depth during the day-one kickoff, but over the course of the next five weeks, participants will learn firsthand how to adopt this a whole new way of eating into their lives and budget.

20 War College students are participating in the six-week Healthy Eating Adventure at no cost, this time only, as Carlisle Barracks pilots the program. For others, like myself, the fee is \$35, which includes the recommended book, *Prevent and Reverse Heart Disease: The Revolutionary, Scientifically Proven, Nutrition-Based Cure*, by Caldwell B. Esselstyn Jr., M.D., published Feb. 1, 2007 by Avery. This is typically a \$65 program.

“There is great community here,” said Brown. “I see that on a daily basis walking around the Barracks I hope this experience, this adventure, if you choose to participate, will foster that community. You’ll be able to meet and spend time with people who aren’t necessarily in your seminar, but who are also prioritizing their health.”

At the end of the night, I decided I'm going to participate in the 28-day challenge and see for myself. Two important questions remained unanswered however. Can I live without bacon? And will I survive Thanksgiving without a turkey dinner?

I'll add my observations in this online journal I progress through the 28-day challenge. Wish me luck.

Seating for this adventure is closed, but interested students can contact Capt. Brown at, kira.a.brown.mil@mail.mil, about future opportunities related to plant based eating.

The group will continue to meet Tuesday nights for the next five weeks. Here is the schedule:

Week 6: Dec. 5. Eat-and-learn potluck -- Graduate and celebrate.