

## **Doctors turning to healthy foods as medicine**

by Barbara Sadick, Chicago Tribune December 20, 2016

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/lifestyles/health/sc-food-as-medicine-health-1221-20161219-story.html>

Dr. Elizabeth Klodas has been a practicing cardiologist in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area for 20 years. She spent the first 10 of those years putting people on medication and the last 10 trying to get them off.

"My patients' cholesterol levels and blood pressure numbers were good, but they all looked and felt awful," she said, "and I realized that what I was doing was just making numbers look good and not treating the underlying problems of diet and nutrition."

In the United States, according to the American Heart Association, 78 million people have hypertension. The Centers for Disease Control says that 120 million, or half of the adult population, is diabetic or prediabetic, and based upon published eligibility criteria, it is estimated that 70 million people are candidates for statin therapy, which involves using prescribed drugs to help lower cholesterol in the blood.

Additionally, the CDC estimates that two-thirds of the population is overweight or obese. The number of people with diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and full-blown cardiovascular disease continues to rise.

In 2014, according to a report by the IMS Institute for Health Informatics, doctors prescribed a then-unprecedented \$374 billion worth of pharmaceuticals. Added to that is \$14,600 more a year per patient for a new class of injectable cholesterol-lowering drugs called PCSK Inhibitors.

These costs are not only unsustainable, says Klodas, but about 20 percent of patients who take cholesterol-lowering drugs or statins have side effects, including muscle aches, changes in mental acuity and liver function abnormalities. Statins have also been shown to increase the risk for diabetes, so although we are improving cholesterol numbers, we are creating other problems that can be worse than the original cholesterol, she says.

Dr. Richard Collins, a Denver cardiologist and the director at South Denver Cardiology Associates' Dean Ornish Heart Reversal Program, made a similar decision to that made by Klodas. Instead of continuing to unblock arteries with angioplasty procedures to treat cardiovascular disease, Collins, who is also known as "The Cooking Cardiologist," began to show his patients how they should cook to prevent heart disease.

"Americans love salt, sugar and fat," says Collins, "but we need to promote the consumption of whole foods, such as fresh vegetables, whole grains and plant-based proteins, in proper portions if we are going to take on and prevent the unsustainable growth of cardiovascular heart disease."

When Klodas realized that no amount of medication could make up for the damage caused by eating an unhealthy diet, she began a personal crusade to find out as much about nutrition and diet as she could. She discovered that the critical nutrients for a healthy heart are fiber (fruits, vegetables, grains), omega-3 fatty acids (vegetable oils, nuts, seeds), antioxidants (fruits, vegetables, beans, nuts) and plant sterols (grains, vegetables, legumes, nuts, seeds).

Klondas says she spent a lot of time talking with patients about what they should eat and where they could find good information but discovered that for every patient who could change his or her diet and cook healthy foods, there were 20 to 30 who couldn't. There was a gap, she says, between knowing what needed to be done and having the time and cooking skills to do it. "I realized how difficult it is in today's world to eat properly for cardiovascular health," she said.

"With the help of my team at Step One Foods, I embarked on a plan to combine precise amounts of whole food nutrients from ingredients such as chia, walnuts, oats and dried fruits into foods that are as easy to use as drugs. The result was the development of a new category of foods that are either ready or almost ready to use, and just like many medications, you only need to take them two times a day," Klondas said.

Her heart healthy company Step One Foods was created to deliver the health benefits from foods that pharmaceuticals deliver from medication. The food is packaged in single-serve "doses" that help lower cholesterol, improve blood sugar levels and promote weight reduction, she said.

Dr. David Katz, president of the American College of Lifestyle Medicine, a field of medicine and health that promotes the use of lifestyle change based on nondrug modalities to prevent, treat and reverse lifestyle-related chronic diseases, says that a number of studies have shown that when one eats, exercises and lives optimally, the risk of chronic disease is cut by 80 percent.

"Once we have rallied a team of professionals to promote healthy eating, we will need to reach out to parents and grandparents — those who have the most interest in a child's welfare — and who should be outraged by the obesity and diabetes epidemic we are witnessing in the U.S., and begin what should become a full-blown cultural revolution to encourage the consumption of real foods like vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, lentils, nuts, seeds and water for thirst that can each have health promoting effects due to the essential nutrients derived from whole real food ingredients," Katz said.