

Raw-Fooder Triathlete Proves Her Philosophy: You Can Do Just About Anything You Want.

Beating Cancer & Injury the Natural Way

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At the age of 63 in 1997, I completed 63 races - triathlons, biathlons, runs, and bike races. I was aiming for 64 races for my 64th year, and by April 22, 1998, I had already won 20 additional races, including two on the previous weekend. I wanted to show that it is possible to grow stronger as you grow older. I was going to be proof of this. Then, while on a bike training ride, a truck driver coming in the opposite direction suddenly saw the street he was looking for, turned, and slammed right into me.

You know how they say that your life flashes before you just before you die? As I was flying through the air, the future flashed before my eyes. I knew that my goal of competing in all these races was about to be over. And at that point, I was in the best physical condition of my life. The injuries turned out to be worse than I could possibly imagine. Both my left leg and right hip had sustained multiple fractures. In the Emergency Room the doctors, when assessing the damage, said that if I hadn't been in such good physical condition, I probably would have been killed - the impact was that hard.

I began physical therapy within two weeks, but progress came slowly. The worst day was about three months later, when the doctor said that I needed to accept that I would never run again, much less race. In response, I doubled my physical therapy. Since my health plan only covered two days per week, I added two more days and paid for them myself. Today, I am back competing again. It makes me laugh--all kinds of doctors are shaking their heads. I recently completed the Hickam and the AARP Triathlons that were within a week of each other!

Breast Cancer Comes and Vanishes

This wasn't the first time I had to bounce back. In 1982, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. The lump the doctors had been watching had, all of a sudden, seemed to have doubled in size overnight. The now golf-ball sized tumour galvanized the team of doctors into action, and I was rushed into surgery. After the tumour was removed and examined, I was so sure that it couldn't be cancer that I got a second, third, fourth, and even a fifth opinion. There was no disputing that it was a moderately fast metastasizing cancer. It was such a shock - as a 14-year-runner and marathoner, I was the healthiest person I knew. But I kept on training, knowing the many benefits of running, which included stress relief. One of the doctors warned me to stop, saying "Lady, forget it; you're a cancer patient; you need to rest, take it easy."

Then, just two weeks after the cancer diagnosis, I saw an event on TV that changed my life: the Ironman Triathlon. This involved a 2.4-mile swim,

followed by a 112-mile bike leg, and then a 26.2-mile marathon. With a sly chuckle, I decided to add biking and swimming to an already heavy running schedule. I found the more I did, the better I felt, and in 1984 I completed my first Ironman Triathlon! In 1986 I was invited to compete in both the New Zealand and Japan Ironman Triathlons, winning age-group firsts and setting national records in both.

At the same time I started training for the Ironman, I investigated the role of diet in breast cancer and the research of Dr. John McDougall. I enrolled in his clinical research study that required a vegan, low-fat diet. My cholesterol went from 236 to 160 in just 21 days. It later went down to 127 and eventually even lower. There were a lot of other benefits, too. I was running faster and enjoying it more. I also beat the cancer, it seemed because all the hot spots indicative of spread to the bone had disappeared, and the tumour in my left lung stopped growing and seemed to be walled off. This led to my philosophy: "You can do just about anything you want."

My Diet

The diagnosis of breast cancer in 1982 shocked me and told me that I was not doing enough diet-wise. That was the motivation to go vegan. I followed a vegan diet for almost eighteen years. That was a major step towards glowing, good health. The final step to raw came about primarily for convenience. It's so natural and makes so much sense that now I can't imagine eating any other way. It's just so darned easy! I started immediately feeling lighter, cleaner and faster and, of course, by all the medical tests, I was free of cancer. I started the raw diet in 1998, mostly because of my speaking and racing schedule, which involves heavy travel.

One of the most important things I've learned over the years is that plants are the proper fuel for the human body. Animals as food not only clog up the circulatory system and suppress the immune system; they are responsible for most of the diseases humans are subject to. I gave grains up primarily because they are deficient in so many nutrients and their preparation takes too much work. Dr. Bill Harris and Doug Graham assured me that I was better off without grains. I rarely eat nuts and seeds because of their high fat and high protein content and the risk of rancidity. I keep a "sprout garden" in my kitchen with a continuous supply of mung bean sprouts by my sink. Regarding supplements, I don't feel they can give me anything that I can't get in fruits and vegetables.

My average daily diet entails "grazing," which means I have no special meal times. In general, my first meal of the day comes after a two-hour workout and consists of greens, a carrot, a banana, and a mango all cut up and mixed with blackstrap molasses and nutritional yeast. I've been eating this breakfast for years now and find that it is easy and satisfying and gets me ready for the rest of the day.

I usually get hungry every two to three hours, so I will snack on carrots, greens, tomatoes, apples, cabbage, and dried fruit such as prunes and cranberries. These ingredients also make up my lunch and dinner with the addition of thinly sliced fresh raw ginger. I also love raw corn on the cob. For

dessert, I eat berries of all kinds. Fruits are my favourite foods. Greens are extremely important, I think, because of their high nutrient-per-calorie ratio.

Training

I run, bike, swim, and lift weights almost every day, and I frequently have trouble backing off. For example, you're supposed to "taper" before a major athletic event, and I say to myself the day before, "I'll just go for a short, easy run," but then I find myself saying, "Just one more mile and THEN I'll quit!" Most other athletes I know don't have trouble with tapering.

I'm now 68, about five feet eight inches tall (I've lost no height as most people do by this age), and weigh about 125 pounds. My body fat percentage is 14 % (the average college-age female's is 30 %), and people frequently guess that I'm in my forties.

Now my health and energy are fantastic! I've done events such as three marathons in three weeks and a total of 67 marathons. I've raced thirty-seven miles to the top of Haleakala on Maui, from sea level to 10,000 feet in seven hours and won an age-group First Place trophy. I've done an Ironman Triathlon one week and set a new State Record in the 25K race the next week. I've won more than 800 First Place trophies in races consisting of triathlons, road running, biathlons, pentathlons (I hold the State record in that one), and much more. I love racing!

Healthful Habits & Greater Awareness

I usually get about five to six hours sleep a night. I get to bed around midnight, and I'm up by 5:00 or 6:00 a.m., raring to go. I enjoy much clearer thinking, greater awareness of my environment, and total empathy for animals, especially those that most people call "food."

The Future of Humanity

I think we have no choice but to go raw in the future. I believe it is easier to eat a raw diet today than it was years ago, mostly because there are a few more people leading the way. We certainly can't keep on doing what we're doing, for many reasons. We can't afford the health care costs; there soon won't be any more rain forests to cut down to graze cattle; and our rivers, streams, and oceans will get so polluted that we won't have any clean water to drink.

We humans have often gone down the wrong path. So far, we have been able to recognize it, back up, and change direction to the right path. This is where we are now. The scientific evidence is very clear that most of our diseases are diet-related and can be reversed by changing our diet.

I believe that the Natural Hygiene teachers are the leaders in the health movement, teaching healthful habits at a time when humanity most needs to hear this message.

The planet is also in big trouble which, again, can be reversed by giving it a chance to revive; and of course, we need to realize that we are not the only creatures on this planet that have the right to live peacefully.

Dr. Ruth Heidrich holds a B.A. and a Master's Degree in Psychology, and earned a Ph.D. in Health Management in 1993. She is the author of *A Race For Life* (Lantern Books) and *The Race For Life Cookbook* (Hawaii Health Publishers). Ruth is an internationally acclaimed author and lecturer, speaking at conferences around the world. She is also a certified fitness trainer and has held three world records for fitness for her age group at the renowned Cooper Clinic in Dallas, Texas. She still actively competes in marathons and triathlons and has won more than 800 trophies and medals since her diagnosis of breast cancer in 1982 at the age of 47. With Terry Shintani, M.D., she has co-hosted the radio show Nutrition and You on KWAI-AM in Hawaii for 14 years. Ruth is past president of the Vegetarian Society of Hawaii and the Mid Pacific Road Runners Club. She won four gold medals in the 1997 Senior Olympics, held in Las Vegas, Nevada.