

The Man Who Saved His Own Life

By Kimberley Paterson 2004

For 20 years Auckland businessman John Appleton placed his health in the hands of the best medical experts money could buy across England and New Zealand as they tried to help him with a crippling problem they could neither diagnose nor treat.

He spent thousands of dollars, tried every drug and medical treatment available but in the end was an intelligent, successful 53-year-old family man watching his life ebb away and his dreams turn to dust.



By late 2002 the Clifton Road Takapuna resident believed he was dying ... "on the way out" he puts it.

Nights were spent in a chair, waking every half hour with ripping stomach and chest pains that he likened to having a heart attack. He couldn't even contemplate a drive over the Harbour Bridge without carrying his special supply of food – the only thing that momentarily dulled the pain.

From June to August 2001, John spent over \$3000 visiting specialists and the subsequent battery of tests including endoscopy, colonoscopy and a fresh round of drugs. If anything the drugs left him worse off with their side effects.

Then after months of helping friend Sir Peter Blake outfit the Seamaster for its environmental mission, John had to wave goodbye while his friends set off for the Antarctic expedition. "I just knew there was no way I could contemplate joining them in the state I was in," says John. (John also skippered Peter's support boat 'Archangel' during the 2000 America's Cup Challenge).

In the end, after problems that began at age 22 and saw him having major laparotomy surgery at 27, John resolved the problem himself.

Such has been the revelatory experience of becoming well that John has been sharing his experience with others who have contacted him.

What's more he is now applying decades of business experience (he and wife Christine founded the Pride of Auckland yachting business) to talk to cutting-edge health experts around the world to help create new solutions for New Zealanders.

One of his most exciting projects is liaising with world experts on Co Enzyme Q10, a vitamin like substance that is believed to have a vital role to play in heart health.

Explains John: "I remember near the end of 2002 I wrote to my specialist and said 'you've got to find out what's causing this because I'm not going to be around for much longer if you don't'. On my next visit all he could tell me was that he thought I had non-ulcerated dyspepsia and suggested some anti depressants to help me sleep.

“This was the turning point,” says John. “I’ve never been depressed and I was so angry I tore up the prescription and started searching for answers on the internet.

“I hooked into every gastroenterology site I could find. All the medically focused sites said much the same thing and talked about new drug treatments ... then about 11pm one night, just as I was about to give up, I found a site put up by a man in North America.

“This man was marketing his solution to the problem he had lived with for 30 plus years. For \$US17 I could download the answer. I was very sceptical but by that stage was willing to give anything a go.”

The advice as almost deceptively simple: change his diet.

For years John had asked his doctors if diet might have anything to do with his condition. They had always replied “no” but even so, John had made his own changes including cutting out what had been an extremely high caffeine intake.

Now John followed the regimen the Canadian suggested: no refined carbohydrates, no processed food, definitely no wheat or sugar or alcohol, no dairy. He began to drink vegetable juices, upped his fruit and vegetable intake and in the process became a new man.

By week one he noted a slight improvement. By week two he found he was waking only twice during the night and the pain would be eased with a few sips of water. Week three he was sleeping through the night. By the fourth week he was beginning to marvel.

By the end of 2003 John was 17kg lighter (down from 95kg), feeling super fit (out sprinting his 22-year-old daughter over 100 metres), there was no more joint pain that once necessitated regular chiropractic treatment, even his eyesight had improved to the point where he could read the newspaper without glasses.

Best of all was the boundless energy and completion cessation of pain.

John says he grew up on the typical Kiwi diet – lots of dairy, weetbix and meat dinners. He attended Takapuna Grammar School and later worked in his father’s sporting goods store before leaving for a seven-year stint working at a London in 1969.

Living in the UK in the mid 70s, John refined his love of coffee even further by purchasing his own Italian espresso machine. He would even take the machine to work with him on night shift and got to the point he was on 15 plus cups a day.

Caffeine and shift work meant poor sleep so he began taking sleep tablets. He began to notice his hands were trembling and what he thought were hunger pains. Things quickly developed so he had to eat every half hour to offset “the hunger pains”. Even back then he remembers having to pull off the M1 to eat to stop gripping stomach pains.

A visit to a London doctor turned into a referral to a specialist, a long list of investigations including barium enema. In 1975 he had major surgery to investigate what doctors thought was stomach cancer but which showed nothing except for an inflamed stomach lining. John cut out the coffee and came home to New Zealand an unwell man.

Over the coming decade while he and Christine raised a family and built a business, ill health was his constant companion. Now at age 55, free of the pain at last, John is a man reborn.

He spends up to 8 hours daily reading, learning all he can about health and wellness. He talks with forward thinking doctors around New Zealand and the world that share an interest in nutrition and supplementation. The phone rings constantly from people looking for help with their own health issues and John has put together a library of lay information to help those in need.

He does a compelling interesting riff on the damage that grains (bread, cakes, biscuits) can do in provoking an insulin response which upsets blood sugar levels, builds fat, hurts joints and heart health.

Coenzyme Q10 is a particular passion. John lost both his parents (his mother was a nurse) to cardiovascular disease and he is adamant he's not following their lead.

"I believe that the human body has an amazing ability to heal itself if we provide the means for it to do so," says John. "For decades I was told by the best medical minds that diet had nothing to do with my condition ... it appears it had everything to do with my condition.

"What's more diet is likely to be the key to most of the diseases and conditions that western civilisation suffers from.

John admits he was initially "almost monastic" in his new dietary regime. These days he just loves it. He and Christine spend a lot on quality organic fruit and vegetables "but we are making a big saving on not buying all the food in the central aisles of the supermarket".

He's a particular fan of his twice-daily vegetable juices which alkalise the system (cauliflower, kale, silverbeet, parsley, celery carrot, beetroot) and has also realised all the foods he used to eat to relive the pain (including milk and yoghurt) in reality kept exacerbating it.

Looking back at the lost years of good health, John is surprisingly not bitter.

"The winds of change are blowing," he says. "Doctors have been trained to dispense pharmaceutical products, but so many of them are now looking for a new way to work. I've met some really wonderful doctors recently who see nutrition as a primary path for wellness."

John Appleton's Diet

- No caffeine
- Almost no alcohol (occasional glass of red wine)
- No refined carbohydrates
- No sugar - "a poison" he says

- No white flour
- No processed foods
- Almost no dairy – apart from un-homogenised Yoghurt and cottage cheese
- Almost no red meat – high sulphur content makes it very acid forming
- Very little fried food – he cooks using coconut/olive oils
- No highly processed Vegetable oils
- No hydrogenated oils – margarine and other highly processed spreads
- No fluoridated water or fluoridated toothpaste
- Lots of fruit and vegetables (mostly organic)
- Fish
- Organic chicken
- Fresh vegetable juices twice daily
- Gluten free bread and organic almond butter
- Quinoa porridge
- Lots of water (filtered to remove the chlorine and fluoride).
- Supplements – vitamin C (2000mg daily); vitamin E (400IU); B vitamins; CoQ10, Lipoic Acid, Prostate supplement; Curcumin (500mgs) Fish Oil (5 grams); Magnesium (400mgs)