

Fresh thinking

A raw vegan diet isn't for everyone. But Connell McNelis, who was diagnosed with kidney cancer three years ago, believes it saved his life

Thirty-four-year-old Connell McNelis is in the best shape of his life.

His energy levels are “through the roof” and he recently completed the Nottingham Half Marathon in the impressive time of one hour and 44 minutes—a personal best for the design engineer and father-of-one from Glasgow.

This may not sound particularly remarkable for a young man like Connell, but less than three years ago, Connell was battling advanced kidney cancer and couldn’t even walk to the end of his street. “I was an invalid and planning my own funeral,” he said.

Connell, who now lives in Derby with his wife and three-year-old daughter, had ‘successful’ surgery to remove a 6.7-cm-wide tumour on his kidney, as well as the entire kidney itself, in March 2013 but, as the cancer had metastasized (spread to other parts of his body), Connell was told to prepare for the worst.

Still, it wasn’t so much the cancer that had turned Connell into a “shell of a man”, but the chemotherapy drug sunitinib, which his oncologist said he would need to take indefinitely, even though it couldn’t cure him.

“My hair went silver, my skin went grey and my eyes went black. I was in constant pain and had no energy whatsoever.”

The drug all but wiped out Connell’s immune system. His white blood cell count dropped to 0.98 K/uL (thousands per cubic millilitre of blood), while the normal range for white blood cells is between 4 and 11 K/uL.

When Connell was told it was too dangerous for him to attend his daughter’s first birthday party, he decided enough was

enough. “I felt I had nothing to lose and came off the treatment. That was the best decision I ever made.”

Crazy for change

Connell’s doctors, family and friends all thought he was crazy for stopping the chemotherapy. But Connell was thinking rationally. “I realized I had to be strong—mentally and physically—if I was going to beat this cancer. And I couldn’t be as long as I was on chemotherapy.”

Connell then started to look into alternative treatments for cancer and natural ways to boost his immune system, and was spending hours online trawling through websites and blogs.

“Everything was pointing to nutrition,” said Connell, “especially the power of a raw vegan diet.”

But meat-eating, dairy-loving Connell was clueless as to where to start, so he signed himself up for a raw-food health retreat.

The Raw Retreat, located in the tiny village of Polyphant in rural Cornwall, became Connell’s home for a week in August 2013. Founded by certified clinical nutritionist Beverley Bird with the goal of helping clients achieve their best possible health, the retreat hosts just one person or couple at a time to provide a bespoke experience that involves health coaching, and various therapies focused on detoxifying and rejuvenating the body.

At the Retreat, a typical day for Connell would start with fresh vegetable juice, meditation and a brisk walk along the coastline, followed by a raw-food workshop, one-on-one yoga, and a raw vegan lunch and dinner. He also had colonic irrigation, far-infrared (FIR) saunas and hands-on healing with Reiki.

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“I thought I was healthy before, but it was a real eye-opener,” said Connell. “It built the foundations for my new raw vegan diet and cleaner lifestyle.”

A new blueprint for life

Once at home again, Connell used what he’d learned at the Retreat to create a “blueprint” for getting well. He bought a juicer and started making green vegetable juices several times a day; he vowed not to eat meat, dairy, sugar or processed foods, and he wholeheartedly embraced a raw vegan and organic diet.

“It was tough,” he said, “but I loved the feeling of being back in control of my body.”

Connell even got his daughter involved. “She absolutely loves making juices with me. It’s part of our morning routine.”

As well as changing his diet, Connell began doing yoga once a week and having regular colonic irrigation, coffee enemas, FIR saunas and oxygen therapy. The aim of all this was to detoxify the body to create “a hostile environment for cancer”, said Connell.

Connell also had a consultation with Dr Patrick Kingsley, whom he’d heard had a lot of success treating cancer patients through natural and holistic means. Dr Kingsley recommended several supplements to boost his immune system, including Biobran—a natural supplement made by breaking rice bran down with enzymes from the shiitake mushroom—and liposomal vitamin C, a form of the antioxidant vitamin that uses microscopic fat particles to carry and disperse the vitamin, making it more absorbable by the body.

Counting the years

After about three months of sticking to his new diet and lifestyle, Connell started to feel a lot better—although no doubt the chemotherapy drug leaving his system also had a lot to do with the improvement. He soon found he could run again, something he’d enjoyed doing regularly before he was diagnosed with cancer, and noticed his distances were gradually getting longer while his recovery times were getting shorter.

But no one was more surprised by the dramatic turnaround in Connell’s health than his oncologist—who had previously told Connell his cancer was terminal and that he didn’t have long to live.

Even though Connell had undergone successful surgery to remove a tumour on his kidney and, shortly



Connell’s anticancer blueprint

Diet and lifestyle

- A raw vegan diet free of refined sugar and processed foods
- A shot of fresh wheatgrass juice every morning
- Freshly squeezed vegetable juices several times a day
- Plenty of filtered water to drink
- Exercise: daily runs, and yoga once a week

Alternative therapies

- Far-infrared (FIR) saunas once a week
- Colonic irrigation or coffee enemas every six months
- Oxygen therapy once a month

Supplements

- BioCare Multivitamins & Minerals: 1 tab/day
- SureScreen Liposomal Vitamin C: 5 mL/day
- Just For Tummies Live Bacteria: one cap/day
- Solgar Organic Flaxseed Oil: 15 mL/day
- Biobran: 250 mg/day
- Solgar Vitamin D: 1,000 IU/day

Connell’s go-to green juice:

- 1 cucumber
- 3 celery stalks
- 1 lemon
- 3 kale leaves
- 1 green apple
- 1 tsp spirulina
- 1 handful fresh spinach

Combine all ingredients together in a juicer (Connell uses the Oscar VitalMax 900, available from www.energiseforlife.com for £249) and serve immediately.

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In the raw

The anticancer plan Connell followed is very similar to the Gerson Therapy, a vegetarian raw-food diet and juicing programme that's become one of the most famous alternative cancer treatments.

Originally developed by the late Dr Max Gerson to treat his migraine headaches, the therapy involves eating a low-fat, salt-free, meat-free diet that includes organically grown, fresh fruit and vegetables, and drinking 13 freshly squeezed juices at hourly intervals throughout the day. Nutritional supplements and coffee enemas are also important features of the treatment.

The thinking behind the Gerson Therapy is that cancer is a disease of the whole organism—the result of a number of damaging factors that combine to cause deterioration of the entire metabolic system—and a cancerous tumour is simply a symptom of this breakdown. The goal of the therapy is to bring the body back to its normal metabolic state by using detox methods and building up the immune system.

There are no randomized



regimen similar to the Gerson Therapy was carried out in Austria. The patients received the standard cancer treatment along with the special diet. The researchers reported that the “diet appeared to help patients live longer than usual and have fewer side-effects”.¹

- In 1995, the Gerson Research Organization did a retrospective study of melanoma patients treated with the Gerson Therapy. The study

reported that patients with stage III or IV melanoma—the types most difficult to cure, as these tumours have spread to the lymph nodes or beyond—lived longer than usual for such severe cancer patients.¹

- A case report of six patients with metastasizing (spreading) cancer who had used or were following the Gerson anticancer diet reported that the regimen had “supported patients to some extent both physically and psychologically”.²

If you are considering following the Gerson regime or a similar anticancer diet, be sure to first speak to your doctor or a suitably qualified health professional.

controlled clinical trials—considered the ‘gold standard’ of scientific evidence—of the Gerson Therapy specifically for cancer, but there are some published retrospective studies that have analyzed past cases. Gerson himself detailed his success in treating several types of cancer in his book, *A Cancer Therapy: Results of Fifty Cases* (Gerson Institute, 1958), and in several papers published in scientific journals. But a review of the available cases in 1959 by the US National Cancer Institute (NCI) could find no proof that the treatment worked.

Nevertheless, a recent summary of the Gerson Therapy, again by the NCI, points out the following promising studies:

- In 1990, a study of a dietary

REFERENCES

- 1 www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK65971/#CDR0000453628_1
- 2 *Integr Cancer Ther*, 2007; 6: 80–8

after, a metastatic tumour on the skin of his head, his initial prognosis hadn't been good. Indeed, according to Cancer Research UK, only around 5 per cent of people with kidney cancer that has metastasized (stage IV) survive for five years or more after being diagnosed.

Connell hasn't yet reached the five-year mark—and he's very aware of not “tempting fate”—but he has been tumour-free for more than two years now, as confirmed by regular scans.

“My next scan is in March and, if clear, that will be three years since my diagnosis,” says Connell. “The longer I go, the less chance there is of it coming back.”

Paying it forward

While Connell isn't out of the woods yet, he's incredibly positive and says he feels the best he's ever felt. So convinced is he by this new way of eating that he's started studying nutritional therapy at the College of

Naturopathic Medicine in Birmingham to understand the science behind it—and also with the intention of helping others in the future.

He's even set up a charity, the Savour Life Charity, to fund nutrition and juicing classes for people diagnosed with cancer, as well as tests and treatments not available on the NHS. It's the reason he ran the Nottingham Half Marathon in September last year. He set a fund-raising goal of £500, but managed to exceed it by seven times.

Looking back on his old habits, Connell isn't surprised he got sick. “I never really ate much fresh fruit or vegetables and lived on sugary and processed foods.”

Now, Connell is proud to call himself “a big vegan hippie”—and a healthy one at that.

Joanna Evans

To find out more about Connell's cancer journey and his charity, visit www.savourlife.co.uk

“The thinking behind the Gerson Therapy is that cancer is a disease of the whole organism”

Useful contacts and resources

The Raw Retreat
www.therawretreat.co.uk;
tel: 01566 880 090

The Gerson Institute
www.gerson.org;
tel: +(858) 694 0707

College of Naturopathic Medicine
www.naturopathy-uk.com;
tel: 01342 410 505

Oxygen therapy
www.hyperbaricoxygen-therapy.org.uk

Far-infrared (FIR) saunas
www.get-fitt.com;
tel: 01923 855 588
www.firzone.co.uk;
tel: 0845 680 7671

Biobran
www.biobran.org