Interview with Dr. Peter Brukner 1

If you're a medical doctor, you're supposed to know a lot about nutrition,

but most medical doctors don't.

Peter Bruckner was even a sport physiologist

and a team doctor for the Australian cricket team.

And he still got overweight, pre-diabetes and then he found low-carb.

I'm Andreas Eenfeldt from DietDoctor.com and I'm here with Dr. Peter Bruckner.

-Thank you for being here. -A pleasure, Andreas.

Shouldn't medical doctors know everything about nutrition?

Well, we should, but it's interesting,

I mean we get taught very little about nutrition in medical school.

Every medical course has a subject called surgery and a subject called pharmacology,

but none of them have a subject called nutrition.

But to be honest I had been interested in nutrition

and 30 years ago I co-authored the first Australian book on sports nutrition,

called "Food for Sport".

And I was very interested in that,

but to be honest I lost a little bit of interest I guess,

because it came pretty boring, sports nutrition,

I mean it was just carbs and carbs and carb loading before marathons.

It was all about carbohydrates and fluids.

You know, don't wait until you're thirsty, you drink lots of fluids.

So that was it, carbs and fluids, I've just sort of accepted that mantra.

Very profitable for the sports drinks manufacturers.

That was fine so I didn't take too much notice of that.

And then things changed for me, in 2012 I was living in England,

I'd just finished a job with the Liverpool football club in the English Premier league.

And I read something that Tim Noakes had said.

And Tim Noakes, I'm sure most of your viewers would know who Tim Noakes was.

Tim Noakes is a South African sports medicine clinician and researcher.

I'd known Tim for years, Tim is a friend of mine.

We'd spoken at numerous conferences together.

He was someone I had always really admired,

his intellect and the way he challenged the accepted norms.

And he'd been proven right on a number of occasions.

So in 2012 Tim came out, you know, not in the way people come out these days,

but came out and he said he was wrong.

He had always been a big advocate of carbs.

He wrote the Bible of running, we call it, "The Lore of Running",

and in it he advocated the high carb diet.

And he came out in 2012 publicly and he said that he had been wrong.

He developed type 2 diabetes himself and put on weight

and he solved his own health problems and subsequently the health problems of others

by switching from a high carb diet to a low-carb high-fat diet.

And I remember reading that and I said, "Oh, Tim finally lost it.

He had been on the edge for a while, but he's gone over the edge now. "

He has always been about, you know, challenging dogmas.

He has, he has, and I thought, "If Tim is not the smartest guys,

he's certainly one of the smartest guys I know."

So it's sort of pricked my interest and I started reading about things.

And I bought a book called "Good Calories, Bad Calories" by Gary Taubes

and I started reading it.

It just blew me away, I mean I just could not believe what I was reading.

The good thing about that book and subsequently Nina Teichoz's book,

is not only about the pros and cons of carbs versus fat and so on,

but also explained the politics in the history

of how the sort of the low-fat movement went out over the low-carb movement

for reasons that had nothing to do with science,

but had a lot to do with politics and money and agriculture and so on.

So was that what surprised you most, or what was it?

Well, I guess what surprised me most...

Every night I'd finished reading and I was saying,

"We couldn't have got this wrong for 30 years."

I mean this is a such a fundamental thing in the Western society,

that we're low-fat, low-fat, low-fat, you know

and saturated fat was bad and we had all changed our eating habits and so on.

And I kept thinking, "This couldn't be right."

It was just mind-boggling and it's quite disturbed me

and I felt a mixture of anger

and I would think about all the people I've told to have carbs and so on.

So I then subsequently read a lot of other books and papers

and I dived into literature and I read everything I could.

And the more I read, the more I looked at it and I thought, "This is incredible!"

And so I thought it was time to do some science

and I decided to do an experiment.

Most scientists and researchers know that N=1 studies are pretty useless.

Absolutely useless.

The only exception is when the one is yourself.

So I decided to do an N=1 experiment on myself.

So, let me paint the picture, I was 60, just turned 60.

I had steadily put on weight gradually probably for 30 years,

maybe a half kilogram per year.

So I was about 93 kg, 15 kg more than I should have been.

My BMI was just over 30 so I was technically speaking obese.

So my kids were starting to sort of poke me in the stomach,

saying, "Come on, dad, do something about that."

And I was like, "Well, hang on."

I'm eating a low-fat diet, and eating everything I'm supposed to be eating,

you know, lots of bread and cereals and pasta and grains and so on

and doing exercise and so on and yet I kept putting on weight.

I was the exact age that my father was when he developed type 2 diabetes

and he ultimately had a lot of problems and passed away a couple of years ago.

And I had a fatty liver, which just turned up on a blood test

over the last or previous 10 years.

And in typical medical fashion I totally ignored.

I didn't understand it, so just put that aside.

In fact I have completely forgotten about it, to be honest.

In retrospect, I mean I was a classic pre-diabetic.

I had a family history, I had abdominal obesity,

I had fatty liver, I had high triglycerides,

but a normal blood sugar.

I didn't realize at the time, but looking back I clearly did.

So I did all my blood tests on day one

and then launched into a low-carb experiment, if you like.

So I stopped eating rice, pasta, bread,

all the sort of things that were my staples, really.

And I concentrated on good, healthy fats

and lots of eggs and butter and bacon and avocado, nuts and cheese...

Good stuff.

And my evening meal it will be meat or fish and lots of green vegetables,

cauliflower rice and all those sort of things.

So I did that for 13 weeks

and the first thing I noticed was that I stopped being hungry.

Previously I'd have my breakfast - cereal in the morning,

whatever time it takes, 7 o'clock, you know,

then by 11 o'clock I'd be looking at, "Oh, it must be lunchtime soon."

I'd be starving, I couldn't wait to eat at lunchtime and so on.

But you know, I used to forget to have lunch, I just wasn't hungry.

And so I went down to really two meals a day, so that was interesting, you know.

Quite a difference, huh?

Quite a difference, then I started to lose weight.

Every week I would weigh myself and I'd lose a kilogram a week.

It was amazing, I was eating all this fat and losing weight.

And that's very motivating.

When you're losing weight, when you're making changes and then you're seeing results,

that is very motivating, so I felt really good.

And the third thing I noticed was my exercise tolerance,

it seemed to improve almost straight away.

I keep saying that it takes 2 to 3 weeks to sort of changeover

from being a carbohydrate burner, if you like, to being a fat burner.

But I found the benefits almost straight away.

I remember coming back upstairs one day and saying to my wife,

"I felt I could've run forever."

So I noticed changes straight away.

So anyway I did 13 weeks on this very strict low-carb diet,

but to be honest I enjoyed the food, I mean I ate really well.

I was never hungry, I really enjoyed what I was eating.

So after 13 weeks I lost 13 kg.

-It's pretty good.

-And I felt great.

And I did my blood tests again and my triglycerides--

Actually, that's not exactly true.

My initial blood tests didn't show that much difference.

And I was a bit disappointed.

My triglycerides hadn't really come down and my HDL--

And I thought, "That's disappointing!"

And I repeated them a couple of months later.

After that I just sort of stabilized it, I didn't want to lose any more weight.

And the subsequent blood test, my triglycerides were going right down,

my HDL was going right up,

my cholesterol, LDL, stayed roughly the same, maybe going up a little bit.

But I, from all the reading I've done, I was very convinced

that the two important factors were the triglycerides and the HDL,

and in particular your triglycerides to HDL ratio.

Mine initially was well over 2 and it went down to 1.

It was halved, basically, as a result.

My triglycerides went down by about 50% and my HDL went up a little bit.

What about the liver enzymes? With your fatty liver thing?

My liver enzymes were absolutely normal.

Because they show you on your blood thing where your previous results were.

I realized then that the three previous tests,

which were I think seven years before, five years before, three years before,

all showed clear evidence of fatty liver,

raised liver enzymes, which are classic for fatty liver.

And as I said... It sounds weird, doesn't it? I mean doctors are terrible.

I had actually forgotten about it or I just pushed it aside into the recesses of my mind,

because I didn't run a deal with it, I didn't understand what it meant.

So, all of a sudden I realized that I'd had a fatty liver.

And I had resolved that fatty liver in 13 weeks of dieting.

So in 13 weeks I lost 13 kg, I was never hungry,

my triglycerides went right down, my HDL went up and I lost my fatty liver.

There was one big problem though.

I had to buy new wardrobe.

-Oh, no.

-None of my clothes fitted.

So it was a costly exercise, but worthwhile at the end.

-So this was three or four years ago? -Yes.

What happened since then?

I have basically maintained the low-carb... Not super strict.

If someone serves me something with some rice or dessert or something,

I'm not going to say no,

but basically I don't eat any of the sort of starchy foods.

I don't eat bread, pasta, or rice, or potatoes and I have continued on.

Because it's an enjoyable-- I don't think of it as a diet.

I think of it as just a lifestyle - that's what I eat.

So in the mornings I'd have eggs and bacon or smoked salmon and avocado,

or I'd have cereal... I make up with full fat Greek yogurt,

I'd have a mixture of nuts and seeds that I'd put together myself and some berries.

And as I said I don't usually have lunch.

Maybe if I get hungry at all during the day,

I'd have a handful of nuts or a bit of cheese

and then for dinner I'll have meat or fish with lots of veggies.

It's a very nice way to live and I've just maintained my weight pretty much.

I put back on a kilogram or so,

but everyone told me after I lost my weight that I looked too skinny then.

But I feel really good, I don't have that mid afternoon sort of crash

when you feel like you're falling asleep in the afternoon

and my energy levels are good and I feel great.

My bloods are still good.

And what I try doing now is spread that message.

I still get frustrated and angry that, you know, there's always evidence now

and it's so obvious to those of us who have looked at it

and yet the rest of the world and the public,

and particularly my medical colleagues and the dietitians and so on

are so blinded to this that they won't see what's going on...

They keep saying that type 2 diabetes is a lifelong...

You will live with it for the rest of your life...

And it's not, I mean, you can reverse it.

You can prevent it, you can reverse it and it's all diet related.

We have a huge problem in that...

The whole medical model I think is wrong - we wait for people to get sick.

And then ply them with drugs and surgery to get them better.

So we have a disease-based model of medicine

instead of a health-based model of medicine.

We don't try to get people back to health, yeah.

Yeah, exactly.

So to rep up your personal story,

what do you wish you would've known when you're starting out?

Well, I wish we'd never gone down this low-fat--

I mean the low-fat experiment, which is what I call it,

because there was no science to justify the experiment,

it was purely based on personalities and politics and money and so on,

it's going to be the most costly experiment, the biggest health disaster.

When people look back in a 100 years in the history of health,

they'll look back and say,

"The single worst decision in the history of mankind, in their health,

was the decision to stop eating fat 30 years ago."

Because when all the food companies, they are clever

and when they took fat out of foods they realized

that takes a lot of the flavor out of foods - "We got to put the flavor back."

And they replaced it with carbohydrates and sugars

and all the different types of sugar and so on.

And as a result we've had these worldwide epidemics

of obesity, type 2 diabetes, fatty liver

that you can trace them back and the graphs start going up

exactly when we bought in those low-fat guidelines.

So the worst disaster in medical history.

-I believe so.

-It's time to end it, huh?

It's long overdue and that's my passion for the rest of my life

is to do everything I can to try and rectify the errors of the last 30 years.

That's fantastic, thank you for the interview - very inspiring.

Thank you.