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EXPLAINING 4LEAF TO MY PATIENTS

By Dr. Kerry Graff

I asked Tom Miller, a 52 year old patient who was a fitness fanatic with recurrent kidney stones, to come in to discuss findings on his CT scan, ordered by his urologist.

KG: “Tom, your CT scan didn’t show any more kidney stones, but it did show a significant amount of plaque in your biggest artery, the aorta. Plaque is caused by cholesterol and fat clogging up blood vessels over time. Are you having any symptoms of leg or chest pain or reduced ability to exercise due to shortness of breath?”

TM: “Are you kidding me?! I eat a really healthy diet and exercise at least 3 days a week for a couple of hours. I quit smoking 25 years ago. I can’t believe it--and no, I am not having any chest or leg pain or shortness of breath.”

KG: “I know it must come as a shock when you feel like you are doing all the right things for your health. I got the results of the blood work you had drawn, though, and they

weren't good. Your total cholesterol was 272, and although you have a high amount of the good cholesterol called HDL, your LDL, the bad cholesterol, was 177 when it should be below 130. Your triglycerides were also high at 222, when they should be under 150."

TM: "This has got to be genetic! I am doing everything right!"

KG: "It is possible that you are, but I'd like to go through a diet survey to see if there is a cause in your diet before we jump to medication."

Tom took the 4Leaf Survey and scored -7, only at the *Better Than Most* level. Despite eating lots of veggies and fruit, an estimated 80-90% of his calories were coming from animal products and processed foods rather than whole plant foods. What was he doing right? Eating three servings of fruits and vegetables a day and avoiding most processed foods.

Where did he go wrong? He thought that eating white meat and seafood was fine as long as he avoided red meat. He was also eating lots of dairy products, using a lot of olive oil, eating lots of eggs "for the protein," and drinking 4 glasses of red wine every night.

KG: "Tom, I'm not sure yet if you are one of the people who has a genetic problem with their cholesterol and need medication to get their levels down. I do know that even if you do have the genetic problem, eating cholesterol, which is present in animal products but not in plants, is like throwing gasoline on a fire. It just makes the problem worse. I'd like you to watch a documentary called *Forks Over Knives* to get an overview of why we think that eating mostly

whole plants is the best diet for humans.

I have the DVD here that I can lend you or you can watch it on Netflix, if you have that. The diet they talk about in the movie, the one you just scored your diet against with the 4Leaf Survey, not only can prevent further plaque from forming, it can actually reverse it. Check out what Dr. Esselstyn did with the heart patients whom the Cleveland Clinic gave up on!”

TM: “Are you saying I’m a heart patient now?!”

KG: “Well, plaque deposits or atherosclerosis, is really a disease of the blood vessels and it isn’t isolated to just one area. So it is likely that all of your vessels are affected. The good news is that you are very active physically and, despite that, haven’t had symptoms yet. Let’s keep it that way by changing your diet. Another plus is that this way of eating reduces formation of further kidney stones, which have given you a lot of grief through the years.”

TM: “That would be great. My kidney stones have been miserable. I’ve had stents put in when the stones have blocked off my kidneys. But what I really don’t want is a heart attack!”

KG: “You and I will work on more diet changes I’d like you to make over time, but for now, I’d like you to watch the documentary so you really understand why this diet works. And make the following changes until we regroup next week:

1. Stop eating all dairy.
2. Eat oatmeal (the kind that takes 5 minutes or more to cook) with some fruit in it rather than eggs for breakfast.

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3. Use a plant based milk like almond or soy instead of cow's milk.
4. Eat soup for lunch rather than your turkey, cheese and mayo sandwich. Veggie soup with beans or rice would be good. Or black bean soup or a veggie chili.
5. Cut back to no more than two glasses of wine a day."

TM: "But why do I have to cut back on the alcohol? There's no cholesterol in wine, is there?"

KG: "No, there isn't. But triglycerides are a mixed molecule of fat AND sugar. And wine has a lot of sugar in it and so will raise triglycerides. The amount of alcohol you are drinking is hard on the liver too. If you are drinking because you are anxious, we should talk about other ways to manage your stress.

We've covered a lot today and you've certainly got some homework and a lot of thinking to do before our next visit in about a week. In the meantime, please call our office if you have any urgent questions."

If this 4Leaf Guide had been available at the time, I would've asked Tom to pay particular attention to the next chapter (and the referenced appendices) before our next visit.