

Rip Esselstyn:

Listen, I know that it can be hard to live Plant-Strong in a world that isn't. Today's episode is the pinnacle example of how food affects the relationships that we have with the people in our lives, and it is my goal to help make it easier to live this way and to get along with your loved ones at the same time. I want you to consider joining us October 23rd and the 24th for Plant-Strong Primer Kitchen Rescue edition. This online event, it's going to be live. It's going to be interactive, and it is designed to give you confidence in the kitchen while troubleshooting some of the relationship hurdles that can always get in the way and create all kinds of tension.

Rip Esselstyn:

One ticket is all you need for your whole household to participate, and everyone receives full video access for a year following the event. Visit primer.plantstrong.com to register. And we're saving you a seat at the Lazy Susan table.

Rip Esselstyn:

I want to welcome you to the final episode of season two of The Plant-Strong Podcast. Today, I'm going to wrap up the Heart of the Hero with three of New York's bravest. I can't think of a more fitting way to wind down this season. And if you're having a hard time following all the voices in this episode, I want you to think about heading over to our YouTube channel where you can watch this week's episode instead.

Rip Esselstyn:

Now, Lieutenant Keith Mitchell was listening to season one of The Plant-Strong Podcast, and he was following the transformation of fellow firefighter Joe Inga, when he decided that it was finally time for him to make the switch to Plant-Strong living. He had already worked hard to keep himself healthy and in shape. He had competed in triathlons for fun for several years, and he had the enthusiastic support of his wife Carrie, who was encouraging him to embrace this Engine 2, Plant-Strong way of life. But much like Joe Inga, the hurdles during mealtime at Keith's fire station were huge and hard to overcome.

Rip Esselstyn:

Despite having seniority, Keith's decision to eat differently shook the firehouse to the core and created a serious riff. But then Keith heard Kevin Duffy's story in season one of the podcast, that was episode 19, and for those of you that don't recall, Kevin is another firefighter from New York, specifically Yonkers, and a true hero for his own health. Last week, I shared more of Kevin's personal story when he took me to the World Trade Center and talked about the passing of his older brother during 9/11.

Rip Esselstyn:

But on that trip to New York, I met up with Joe Inga and Kevin Duffy. And together, we went out to visit Lieutenant Keith at the New York City Firefighter Training Academy, where Keith is now an instructor. On arrival, Joe gave us the tour of the training facility.

Rip Esselstyn:

What are all these buildings?

Joe Inga:

So over there behind building one here, that's like the Marine simulator. It simulates a boat. Building one is our high rise simulator. Building two is our smokehouse. Three, four, and five are like combination taxpayer tenement buildings. Those are like live burn buildings. Twelve, we call it Sesame Street, so it simulates a city block in there. Eleven, we have a lot of our classrooms, and then, if you walk up further past these buildings, there's a giant tent. There's a massive subway simulator. There's a couple of different subway cars, and then they have a whole tunnel simulated in there. You go in there, and we do counter-terrorism drills and stuff. They smoke it up. You got Hazmat all the way in the back corner, the flashover simulators, and then you have the shops right in the middle that does the maintenance on the rigs.

Rip Esselstyn:

So when you went through the academy, how many firefighters did you go through with?

Joe Inga:

I think we started with around 350, and we finished around 280. A lot of people dropped, so usually, a class is between 300 and 350.

Rip Esselstyn:

And how many months was it?

Joe Inga:

When I went, it was 18 weeks, then it went from 13 weeks to 18 weeks, to 23 weeks, and back down to 18, so now it's 18 weeks.

Rip Esselstyn:

It was really good to see Joe and understand where his firefighting career began. As we head inside to meet Lieutenant Keith Mitchell, here's a little background for you. Keith wrote to me to share how life has changed since he's gone all-in with plants. And in the short time since he made the switch, he's shaved 15 minutes off his Olympic triathlon times. And considering that that's just about a 2:15 to two and a half hour event, 15 minutes is a substantial amount. And he's also discovered that he no longer needs rest days in between training. He feels and looks better than he has in years. But despite the internal success, the external pressures back at the firehouse are still very intense.

Rip Esselstyn:

Today, we're going to wrap up our season dedicated to the heart of the hero by celebrating these three Plant-Strong firefighting warriors who are, each and every one of them, swimming upstream in a culture that leaves little room for anyone to go against the status quo. We're going to talk about how differently they view the food culture that they once belonged to and how hard it is to maintain a brotherhood and a sisterhood when you are trying to live Plant-Strong.

Rip Esselstyn:

You're going to hear Joe say, "When you turn your back on the table," meaning the dinner table, "you're turning your back on the house." That says it all, so let's pick up during our candid conversation. And be warned, when firefighters circle up, there is no topic that's off-limits.

Rip Esselstyn:

What was it like at the firehouse when the other guys found out that you-

Keith Mitchell:

Well, being here, you could really just not talk about it. Alright? You just bring your own food, you just hang out, and you don't talk about it. So nobody really knew. Guys had known based on my Instagram posts, but that was it.

Rip Esselstyn:

So when you say here, you mean the academy.

Keith Mitchell:

The academy, being assigned to the academy. But the first couple of days I went back, it was a tough transition.

Rip Esselstyn:

How so?

Keith Mitchell:

Ah, you know.

Rip Esselstyn:

No, I don't know. Tell me.

Keith Mitchell:

A couple of guys didn't like the fact that I didn't eat what they were making. Being a firefighter, you're more involved in the meal-making process. Me, I'm just supposed to be upstairs doing my work. That's it. So they didn't like the fact that I would be downstairs trying to get my own food ready, or I'd bring in my own food. I'd offer to pay every time just because I don't want to be out, but you could hear guys talking. "You don't get to choose what you eat. You eat what we make you." Most-

Rip Esselstyn:

That sound familiar?

Joe Inga:

Yeah, I feel like I'm listening to the podcast.

Keith Mitchell:

Well, it's funny. That's why I ... But yeah, I even had one guy tell me, "Just remember, when you're out, you're out for life." I was like, "Well, that's awfully tough." But I'm like, "Well, why can't you just go out and get me an eggplant, and I'll just saute some eggplant or something like that? Or whatever, I could just do whatever."

Rip Esselstyn:

What does he mean when you're out? You mean if you're-

Keith Mitchell:

When you decide that you're not going to pay for your meal anymore-

Rip Esselstyn:

You're out for life.

Keith Mitchell:

... you're out. Yeah, you're no longer included in a meal.

Rip Esselstyn:

That's a little harsh.

Keith Mitchell:

Yes.

Joe Inga:

But that's a big thing. It's a slight toward the house, not just the mean because the kitchen table is so ...

Keith Mitchell:

So it's out.

Rip Esselstyn:

Right, right. Right.

Keith Mitchell:

And the difference is, it's just like I said, it's weird for them to have the office downstairs trying to cook food as well because, like I said, they don't want you there. They're like, "No, we cook your food, and we got it. We'll take care of it." And when I told them like, "I'm not going to eat that," and I just asked them certain little things like, "Can you just not put milk in something?" It was just completely like, "Well, why can't I put milk in it?" Like that, and they didn't really understand it.

Keith Mitchell:

They would go out and get raviolis and like, "Oh, we got some spinach raviolis for you, Lou." And I'm like, "Alright, but it's got eggs in the pasta noodles. It's got ricotta cheese inside. The spinach is sauteed with garlic and oil. What is so good about ... Oh, and don't forget the meat sauce you put on it." You get a little kickback.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah, it all adds up. So these guys that are saying, "Hey, remember, when you're out, you're out for life," are these guys that are below you in rank?

Keith Mitchell:

Yeah, they're all firefighters. The officers, we're in our office doing our job, and that's it, and whatever we have to do for the day. And usually, the firefighters cook the meal. He could tell you. They go in to shop together. I stay on the rig, so I don't get involved in that process. They come in, they start preparing the meal together, that's their thing. And then when they call chow, that's when they expect to see you.

Rip Esselstyn:

How do they call chow? What do they say?

Keith Mitchell:

They just ring the bells.

Rip Esselstyn:

Chow's hot or chow's on?

Keith Mitchell:

Yeah, just go down, and they ring the bells and say, "Chow's on."

Rip Esselstyn:

Chow's on? Man. I mean-

Joe Inga:

Traditions.

Rip Esselstyn:

It is crazy, isn't it?

Joe Inga:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

Man. But it sounds like you've weathered the storm. You're weathering the storm.

Keith Mitchell:

Well, I explained to one of the guys that, "You know what? I'm only here for a few weeks because I go back to the fire academy at the beginning of November, so I'm just going to do my own thing. And I'll just come in." So I would just sit around. I would pay whatever, just hang out at the kitchen table, listen to them talk, or I'd find some work I had to do. I'd just do that, and then I'd come down whenever I felt like it, just bring my water down. Maybe if they made something like broccoli or something like that, I'd have some broccoli, whatever.

Keith Mitchell:

And then when they were done, I'd just, "Alright, listen, could we just stop off? I'm going to pick up something to eat real quick." I just go get something.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. So at that station, how many guys and gals were there.

Keith Mitchell:

Usually, there's 11.

Rip Esselstyn:

11?

Keith Mitchell:

Five in the engine and six in the truck.

Rip Esselstyn:

That's a lot.

Keith Mitchell:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

What house was that?

Keith Mitchell:

I work at Engine One Ladder 54. I'm assigned to Engine One.

Rip Esselstyn:

Engine One?

Keith Mitchell:

Yep.

Rip Esselstyn:

Have you ever been through there?

Keith Mitchell:

You can tell him the truth.

Joe Inga:

I've worked there one tour about 12 years ago.

Keith Mitchell:

You can tell him the truth about it.

Joe Inga:

The first time I walked in that door, I was on the detail. I was like, "Alright, who's taking up?" And they're like, "Put your stuff down. Go down the block. Get a granola bar, stick it in your pocket. Grab a bottle of water." I was like, "Yeah, I know you guys are busy. I went down there, literally never came back for the rest of the tour. We were that busy.

Rip Esselstyn:

Wow!

Keith Mitchell:

We do close to 7,000 rounds a year.

Joe Inga:

That one company, not the house.

Kevin Duffy:

20 a day.

Rip Esselstyn:

That's 20 a day.

Keith Mitchell:

Yeah. And the truck does another 5,000 to 6,000 runs a year. So if the house combined, that's 13,000 runs a year.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah, that's-

Keith Mitchell:

And we deal with ... because we're right in the middle of Midtown ... You were in the city today. We got the traffic and all that stuff.

Rip Esselstyn:

What are most of your runs? If you're averaging 20 a shift, that's a lot.

Keith Mitchell:

Yeah. It's stressful. It's a high-stress environment to work. It's stressful because of a lot of construction going on. It's stressful because it's high tourist, so there's a lot of people in the area. There's also a lot of people on the streets. New York City, you guys probably saw a little bit today with a lot of people on the streets. You do a lot of CFR responses, EMS responses, a lot of-

Rip Esselstyn:

What's a CFR?

Keith Mitchell:

Certified first responder.

Rip Esselstyn:

Okay, got it. Got it, got it.

Keith Mitchell:

Yeah, you do a lot of CFR responses.

Rip Esselstyn:

Would you say that 60% to 80% of your calls are medical calls?

Keith Mitchell:

Probably a little over 50, probably, between 50 and 60 are medical emergencies. A lot of automatic alarms that go off in hotels, them bigger buildings up there. We get a few structural responses every tour. And then, because of where we are, we get some really interesting major emergency, major citizen. Yeah, so we do a wide range of running.

Rip Esselstyn:

With all the medical calls you guys make, are you guys also EMTs, paramedics?

Keith Mitchell:

We're just CFRs, some with CFR-Ds, certified first responders.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah, so that's why I didn't know that term. In Austin, we're all either EMTs, or intermediate, or paramedics.

Keith Mitchell:

Yeah, New York state is the last holdout, or New York City is the last holdout it feels like. A lot of states go that route, but we're the like the last ones that have the CFR response.

Rip Esselstyn:

Right. So what are you thinking? You feel like this is a lifestyle you're feeling good about? You think it's going to stick?

Keith Mitchell:

I enjoy it. You could ask Carrie about my cooking, but I enjoy it. It's a lot of fun. You get out of that ... At first, you're like, "What am I going to eat?" Right? You're sitting there like, "What the hell am I going to eat tonight?" You're looking at your calendar, or you're looking at your cupboards and all that. And you're like, "Man, I've got a can of beans. I've got some rice." But you find a couple. The resources are so available to you. You could go anywhere and just type in black bean burgers, and a recipe will come up for you to try. It's amazing.

Keith Mitchell:

It's like, okay, so you took everything that was in there, and you said, "I don't have anything to eat." And now you figure out what to eat, so I'm having a great time with it. I'm having a lot of fun, so I definitely think it's ... I like the way I feel.

Rip Esselstyn:

And you're getting faster.

Keith Mitchell:

I am getting a little faster. Yeah. I've also noticed that I like being myself. Not that I was a heavy person ever, but I'm also losing weight. You just realize that you feel healthier, you look healthier., and certain things that you always thought about, it's not there. You're not worried about that stuff. You recover faster too. You're up in the morning, and I don't drink as much coffee. I do love coffee, but I definitely don't need to drink as much of it as I used to.

Rip Esselstyn:

So now that you're with these two Plant-Strong studs, do you have any questions for these guys? Because they've been through the wringer. Right? This guy has been doing it ... How long have you been doing it now?

Kevin Duffy:

Over four years.

Rip Esselstyn:

Four years. This guy is like a good almost a year now.

Joe Inga:

Nine months, yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

Nine months. Have you got any questions for these guys?

Keith Mitchell:

No, I wasn't ... I mean, I've talked to Kevin on the phone. A couple of days ago, I followed his feed, his Instagram feed, and all that stuff. I mean, all the information that they would give to you, he's put out there. I've asked his friend, Tommy, questions about it. Actually, before I went back to the firehouse, I asked his friend out to Montauk, "Alright, how did you do this? How did you do that?" And he just told me certain ways to get around certain things, trying to get the meal together.

Keith Mitchell:

I always went in and got something for myself like an eggplant, or I would make veggie burgers or whatever. He always told me certain ways. So I had asked some questions before going back to the firehouse to line me up. I still had a hard time.

Kevin Duffy:

It doesn't get easier.

Keith Mitchell:

Yeah. And it feels like they do it on purpose to you after a while.

Rip Esselstyn:

I'll tell you when it does get easier. It'll get easier when, as we talked about, when you can get a quorum, when you've got more of the guys eating this way than aren't eating this way. And that's what happened at Station 2. We got all five of us there to jump in and do it. And it's nutrition that then started, I mean, that we started, and it remained for six, seven years.

Rip Esselstyn:

When I went through the academy in 1997 in Austin, it was six months long. Four months was fire suppression, and the last two months, everybody got their basic EMTs. And what I discovered is that you go through the academy, you are lean, you're pretty mean. You're lean and mean. You're psyched to be a firefighter. You're hungry for it. You get out into the station, and you're not working out as much. You get sucked into ... I didn't, but you get sucked into eating on the wagon. Right? And so you're eating all the fried stuff. You're eating all the dairy, all the ice cream, everything.

Rip Esselstyn:

And on average, I'd say most firefighters that I went through the academy with gained somewhere between three to seven, eight pounds a year. So 10 years in, these guys have gained 30 to, some of them, 100 pounds. Right? And I mean, what it is about the firefighter culture that has these guys pulled into this vortex of eating this insanely unhealthy food? And then to boot now, we also, as a profession, have the number one incidence of deaths on the job. I mean, what's going on there?

Keith Mitchell:

You know what I think? I think it's a macho thing. It's just all about being macho. It's all about proving you can eat more than the next guy, or I don't want to eat that. I want to eat steak. We about to eat steak. It's like a macho thing. It's that whole men eat steak, that's all there is to it, and they eat a lot of it.

Rip Esselstyn:

So you think it's a part of their identity.

Keith Mitchell:

Yeah, I just think it's a part of who they are, and that's what they want to do. I'll sell you the whole lot. But that's definitely, watching over the course of the last couple of weeks and stuff like that, and seeing everybody go about ... They're going for seconds and thirds, and it's like, "Alright, we're going to get a run any minute now. Just remember, as you start eating that chicken cutlet, we're going out the door for ... We don't know what it's going to be. We could be walking yup 40 flights. We don't know. So take that as your own consideration when you eat like that."

Keith Mitchell:

So that's what I think about the eating thing. It's all about this is what men do. It's a macho-ism thing. It's ...

Rip Esselstyn:

But I tell people it's like the standard American diet on steroids. I mean, everything is fried. Everything is ... I mean, let's see how much healthier we can make it. It's almost like a game to see-

Keith Mitchell:

And it's not like normal portions either. You don't go out and get regular ... You don't go in the store and be like, "Oh, yeah. Let's get those. They look good. Right?" No, it's got to be the 16-ounce steaks or-

Joe Inga:

A pound of meet a man.

Keith Mitchell:

Yeah. We have 11 guys. They do 10 pounds of chicken. That's what they order, or they do 10 pounds of pork or sausages. That's their thought process is at least a pound a guy. The math for pizza is three slices a man.

Rip Esselstyn:

In your firehouse, what's something of the favorite things that you guys there eat?

Kevin Duffy:

Yes, I mean, the same to touch upon that. It's so funny looking back now, how much has changed because it's hard to have the conversations with guys. Because I was guilty of it for four years, right? So I did it. I got hired. I came out of the academy gung-ho, ready, fit, went through physical training, and all this stuff. And then four years later, put on like 30 pounds, more than that, and paid no mind to what we were doing because we cook a lot because the kitchen table is the place to be. It's the camaraderie. It's where we get along, and we tell stories and learn from other jobs, or break each other's chops tell jokes.

Kevin Duffy:

It's a lot of fun, but you're sitting there mindlessly because one, you're all chipping in. Right? You get a lot of bang for your buck when you get 11 guys chipping in on one meal. You can get a lot for eight bucks a guy. You can get endless amounts of cutlets and meatballs, and ravs, and lasagna, and you're just chit-chatting and hanging out. And, "Oh, we got more?" And I was doing that. I was like, "This is amazing. This is such a great place."

Kevin Duffy:

And there was such a disconnect of why I felt and looked the way I did, compounded with the lack of sleep, and the wacky schedule, and the stressful environment. All that leads to how you feel, but food never came into the equation. It's like, "Oh, we had a bad night. We had a lot of runs. We had a job where we walked a bunch of flights," or whatever you were doing. But it was like it was never really, for myself and I think for a lot of guys, that's the disconnect. They don't connect that to the heart disease, and the cholesterol, and the blood pressure, and sadly, early heart attack deaths.

Kevin Duffy:

They're so quick to the sleep or to, "Oh, it's just in my family," or, "It's just the way it's going to be." Where now, learning what we're all learning, it's like, "You're crazy not to make that connection because it's so clear now." What the hell were we doing? Right?

Kevin Duffy:

I mean, not to toot my own horn, but we were talking about physicals. And you guys get, I think, bi-annual. We get an annual physical. And I walked in and the nurse practitioner goes, she's like, "You're the healthiest one that's walked in on the whole job, 450 guys." And she goes, "You're the healthiest one that's walked through the door. And I was like, "Well, I'm not surprised," like a little bit pompous.

Kevin Duffy:

She's like, "Well, why?" I'm like, "It's just I take care of myself, and I changed a lot of my lifestyle." And she's like, "Oh, wow. That's interesting." This is coming from a nurse practitioner in a hospital, wondering why I'm not like the rest of the majority.

Kevin Duffy:

But it is, it's that macho thing, and I did it. And it's hard to say we want to educate the guys, but I was there. It's like, "Yo, guys. I was there. I understand." We've got to bridge that gap.

Rip Esselstyn:

Well, I think you're right. I think we have to bridge the gap. We have to bring this new way of being a man and being the best firefighter into the firefighter culture. And I think hopefully, the game-changers will help do that. Right? I think the way social media is, guys will start realizing that they're pummeling themselves around the breakfast table, the dinner table, the lunch table. Yeah.

Kevin Duffy:

Guys are like, "You'd be horrified at what we made at dinner last night." I'm like, "I'm horrified for you." They all look at me like, "You would have walked out of the kitchen." I'm like, "You guys ate it." It's this whole deflection thing that it's like, I don't know, it's weird. And you're just like whatever. I'm like, "Well, I'm going to go train and race and do my thing," then try and be an example without getting caught up in the conversation.

Rip Esselstyn:

You have another bowl of ice cream.

Kevin Duffy:

Yeah.

Keith Mitchell:

You do get horrified at it. I was telling Carrie the other day, you watch them stirring the eggs, cutting up the chicken cutlets, dipping them in the eggs, doing that, putting them in the breadcrumbs, and putting them in the fryer. And you're just like, "Oh, my God! I used to eat that." And you're like, "What the hell? What the heck was I ... I ate al that." And I would eat three, four servings because I was active. I was always hungry, or I was coming in hungry.

Keith Mitchell:

You're just disgusted more with yourself than anything else. You're like, "Wow, I can't believe I ate like that. What the hell?"

Joe Inga:

I sit in the corner and I count the calories throughout the day that I would have normally been eating. Even though I know that there's food I can't have in the fridge, I look at it, and I go, "There's chicken cutlets in there. I would have eaten that on one of those rolls." I'm processing what my normal day used to be.

Kevin Duffy:

I ate a big breakfast.

Joe Inga:

Yeah, and the eggs an hour later.

Keith Mitchell:

Yeah, funny you said that because after breakfast, they would put it out, and put a fried egg on top of it. They would have done something like that, or you take a Sicilian slice of pizza, and you put an over-easy egg on top of that for breakfast. I'm like, "Holy cow!" You're just disgusted more with yourself than ...

Joe Inga:

Well, you walk around and you go through ... we have the bread bin or whatever. And I come in and I'm looking for a snack or whatever, and I open the bread bin just to see. Maybe sometimes there's whole wheat bread. I know we have peanut butter or whatever. And like six bags of chips, white bread, white rolls, and then I look on the counter, there's a cake or doughnuts, three boxes of doughnuts. I go in the fridge, there's leftover steak. And I'm like, "No wonder why I had such an issue. I'm here for 24 hours, and this is what I was eating." So I go for the oatmeal under the cabinet and just have that for a snack or whatever.

Kevin Duffy:

That's a game-changer, the oatmeal.

Rip Esselstyn:

You didn't look at-

Rip Esselstyn:

[crosstalk 00:26:48] that's just food, in fact-

Joe Inga:

You can store it in a coffee mug. They sit there with their ice cream in the coffee mug, I've got my oatmeal. And I'm like, "I'm good."

Keith Mitchell:

Even at breakfast, nobody even realized oatmeal, nobody realized that oatmeal with peanut butter on it, you just eat that in a corner, and nobody realizes it. It's only at lunch when you say, "Listen, will you do me a favor? Just leave the meat and the cheese off of it." They're like, "Oh, are you kidding me with this?" I'm like, "Really? It's that much of an inconvenience?"

Rip Esselstyn:

What are some of the names they've called you?

Keith Mitchell:

I'm not going to say anything.

Rip Esselstyn:

By you know what I find amazing? At Fire Station 2, we're right on the outskirts of the University of Texas campus. I can't even tell you how many people would come, and they'd give us cupcakes. They'd give us cookies. They would bring us ... There were at least, I'm not exaggerating, seven different pizza joints, and they'd send us their dead pizzas that people didn't pick up. So we were never at a lack for having all kinds of food in the station. It was just insanely unhealthy food like you were just describing.

Rip Esselstyn:

There's the steak. You open up this drawer, there's the chips. Here's the ... It's never-ending.

Kevin Duffy:

I used to love when you got the neighbor come by with the brownies and the cookies. Right? I used to go to town on those, and now I just realize it's not doing anything for you. So yeah, it is that disconnect, I think. When you finally look at food different, you're like, "Holy cow, that's not that good for you."

Keith Mitchell:

And he could vouch for everybody. He's like the shining example. They talk about all this other stuff, though. They talk about medicals and your heart rate. They talk about how they picked you up on this or your cholesterol. They bring it up all the time. But then when you tell them, "You could stop that. You know that, right? You could just throw a couple more plants on that plate." And they're like, "Are you kidding me? No, you can't do that." They look at you weird. You're like, "Oh, no. We could do something different tonight."

Rip Esselstyn:

You're like, "Okay, I have the answer, and here it is." And they're like, "That's crazy. That's way too extreme. I could never think about doing that."

Joe Inga:

It's like the simple changes, though. They wanted steak the one day. I didn't make myself a steak, but I made the sides the way I would have them without the oil, and a couple of guys afterwards were like, "Why do I not feel full?" I'm like, "You don't have 4,000 calories of oil smothering the potatoes and broccoli right now."

Rip Esselstyn:

That's right.

Joe Inga:

Just those little changes like start with the sides or whatever, that's what I've been trying to tell guys. It's starting to gradually catch on a little bit.

Rip Esselstyn:

When you're used to eating the way we all used to eat, you don't feel full until you have that bowling ball in your stomach. Right? And now-

Kevin Duffy:

That's all we know.

Rip Esselstyn:

It's all we know. Right? And then when you switch to this, you're like, "Am I full or not?" There's a little bit of a break-in period when you have to realize that your satiation is a little bit different.

Joe Inga:

Yeah, but even the in-betweens, too, I notice. Let's say we had a big lunch at the firehouse. We didn't have dinner until 9:00, 10:00, whatever. You would go from I'm full, bowling ball to I'm starving. That's when you would start eating all the crap in the firehouse. And now, I notice alright, I'm hungry, but I never get to the point where I'm starving. I just don't feel that crazy urge anymore. I could be hungry, but comfortable hungry, not like I got to eat something now.

Kevin Duffy:

The other funny thing that always comes up too, and I hate that it's ... But guys think that we're pointing fingers, but we're really just out to help them. Because you hear all the sick jokes where guys will eat dinner and be like, "Oh, man, if we get a job tonight, I'm puking in my mask." That's a mask puking meal.

Keith Mitchell:

I've been there before, yeah.

Kevin Duffy:

And we joke about it because it's a funny thing where you've eaten-

Keith Mitchell:

Not like that, but I've had that feeling before.

Kevin Duffy:

... you've eat a big meal, meatballs and sausage, and you get a call and you're at a working structure fire for an hour, the guys vomit in their mask in the job, and then they point fingers and laugh. That's your body revolting the food that you ate. It's funny and macho, and cool, but it's like, yo, in actuality, it's pretty sad and terrible, a terrible way to feel. The manly thing is to be ready and fueled, and not feel like

a bag of hell walking into a job, or having to walk up eight flights, or 10 flights, or whatever you got to do, even a couple of flights.

Kevin Duffy:

It's all those things. No, we're not trying to point fingers. We're just trying to bring some light to the conversation. That's kind of messed up. It's funny, but it's also terrifying.

Rip Esselstyn:

Getting a little personal here, but what about number two? I mean, how has that changed since you guys started embracing this?

Kevin Duffy:

I mean, I had issues my whole life, so I'll be the first to say it's improved vastly. Quick story, I was run over by a car when I was four in a parking lot, and I think a lot of my digestive issues as a kid stemmed from that, probably, from scar tissue across my midsection, which I didn't realize until later in life. But then there was a connection of I lived on cereal and whole milk until I was like 15, three bowls a day, plain eater, hated everything, so I just lived on sugar and milk and had horrible issues my whole life. And now, in the last couple of years, it's clockwork.

Rip Esselstyn:

It's like clockwork, what does that mean? Is it for-

Kevin Duffy:

Every day at 6:00 AM, and then sometimes, twice a day. But the funny thing is, that's what people don't talk about, right? They're like, "You go to the bathroom that much?" I'm like, "That's the body's easiest way of getting rid of stuff it doesn't want. And until you realize it's a perfectly designed system, and use it for how it's supposed to function ..." People are like, "Oh, that's horrifying." And I'm like, "No, it's actually amazing-"

Rip Esselstyn:

Oh, yeah, it's-

Rip Esselstyn:

[crosstalk 00:33:19]

Kevin Duffy:

Because the more you eat, the more you go, the better you feel. Right?

Rip Esselstyn:

How about you? He's a one a day-er, sometimes two.

Kevin Duffy:

Sometimes two.

Joe Inga:

I'm usually like a one a day-er, but, I mean, I've spoken to you about it. It's great, but when it comes, it comes. I've had some situations like if I'm working first thing in the morning, you've got to take off right-

Keith Mitchell:

He's got that really tight relationship right now.

Kevin Duffy:

Yeah, it's mass quantities too, sometimes.

Rip Esselstyn:

Something comes knocking on the back door.

Joe Inga:

When it comes knocking ...

Kevin Duffy:

But it's also if you realize what you ate. I had a big day yesterday, ate a lot, and my body pulled what it want, and it's getting rest of what it doesn't. It's just a simple filtration system.

Rip Esselstyn:

That's right.

Kevin Duffy:

Because everyone makes it out to be this crazy thing. I'm like, "No, it went like this. It sifted through a sifter, and that stuff, we don't need."

Joe Inga:

But it's easy to do one.

Kevin Duffy:

But amazing if you don't go, that's stuff's stuck in you, rotting.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah, purifying.

Kevin Duffy:

Yeah, people are like, "If it smells bad ..." I always say, "Well, what does it smell like when it's stuck in you in a dark closet?" It's just getting worse.

Rip Esselstyn:

And then what's it's doing, then it's rubbing back and forth, back and forth. And people wonder why we have such a prevalence of colorectal cancer these days, diverticulitis, GI distress. Right? It's because you have-

Kevin Duffy:

It's just rotting in there.

Rip Esselstyn:

You have all this food, basically, that has all kinds of toxins, that are laden with toxins, that are basically rubbing up against that very precious lining of your intestines.

Kevin Duffy:

Yeah, that's like your stomach lining, all is like paper thin.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. How about you?

Keith Mitchell:

It's definitely a lot more consistent, we'll say. That'll be the best of putting it.

Kevin Duffy:

Regular?

Keith Mitchell:

Yeah. You just feel better about yourself. It's a lot more consistent. You're eating better food, and you notice that right away.

Rip Esselstyn:

And is it fair to say that when you do go to the bathroom, you're not waiting very long? I mean, usually, you're ... I like to say that my craps are as fast as my pees or faster.

Keith Mitchell:

It's a pretty quick process. You're not struggling with it. You juts go, and that's it.

Kevin Duffy:

Your slogan is, eat more plants, take epic dumps. Right? Is that your shirt?

Rip Esselstyn:

Well, no, that's not my shirt, but-

Kevin Duffy:

That's not yours, so someone's shirt-

Rip Esselstyn:

That's somebody, they sent it to me, and I've worn it, just like yours. Right? Everything started from a seed, including this turd. Right?

Kevin Duffy:

Yeah. Eat more plants, take epic dumps. It's true.

Rip Esselstyn:

It's true. I mean, I take three epic dumps a day. Right?

Kevin Duffy:

Three?

Rip Esselstyn:

There's a gastrointestinal response every time, after breakfast, about 15 or 20 minutes later, lunch, 15, 20 minutes later, dinner, 15 to 20 minutes later.

Kevin Duffy:

Amazing.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. You'll get there. You'll get there.

Kevin Duffy:

The morning one I know is clockwork. Sometimes that's-

Keith Mitchell:

Aspire for greatness, Kevin.

Rip Esselstyn:

What'd you say?

Keith Mitchell:

Aspire for greatness.

Kevin Duffy:

Aspire for greatness.

Rip Esselstyn:

Aspire for greatness.

Kevin Duffy:

Three a-days.

Rip Esselstyn:

Exactly. I love it. I love it.

Kevin Duffy:

Yeah, that's funny.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah, so the whole theme of the season two Plant-Strong podcast is the Heart of the Here, and I can't think of better people to have on the show for season two than you guys that are all firefighters here in New York. Joe Inga, the star of season one. Kevin Duffy, right? Was it episode 19?

Kevin Duffy:

Yep.

Rip Esselstyn:

Right? In season one. And then, now the new kid on the block here, Keith. And you guys, these other firefighters, they need people to lead. They need people to show them what is possible and that this is the smartest, most intelligent, and the most manly way to eat if you want to be the best version of yourself, the best firefighter that you can be, and if you want to aspire for greatness. Right?

Rip Esselstyn:

I mean, anyway, to me, it's a no-brainer, but we've got to get them to see that as well. But you guys, in my book, you guys are all heroes. I mean, this is a very courageous, brave thing to do. It's not easy to separate yourself from the status quo, to come onto the podcast and be as vulnerable and as courageous as you were for that whole season.

Joe Inga:

Just putting it out there.

Rip Esselstyn:

You put it out there, but look at all the good that's come of it.

Joe Inga:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

Right? I mean, it's a beautiful thing. So what I would love to do, and I think it would be great if we could figure out another time that we could all gather around and get together, whether it's over just another little session like this, or whether we all get together, maybe we make a commitment to do a triathlon together. Right? A little swim, bike, and run, together. So let's figure out, we'll figure out a race that makes sense, a date that makes sense, a location that makes sense and works for all of us.

Kevin Duffy:

Cool.

Joe Inga:

Sounds good.

Rip Esselstyn:

Sound good?

Kevin Duffy:

Sounds good.

Rip Esselstyn:

Give me a little bump, a little bump, a little bump. How about let's do a little circle bump? Ready? There we go. Plant-Strong, baby.

Rip Esselstyn:

I know you've all probably seen the phrase, "Be the hero your dog thinks you are." Well, in today's episode, Highlighting Heroes, I can think of no better way to thank the support of Wild Earth than by honoring them as the heroes that they are. By providing clean fuel and protein-packed, plant-based protein in their dog food formula, Wild Earth ensures the health and vitality of your pet for years to come. So if you want to be the hero that your dog thinks that you are, treat them to Wild Earth dog food. Visit the episode page at plantstrongpodcast.com to claim 50% off your order.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yes, yes, and yes. We all should aspire to greatness just like these three have done. I want to thank Joe, Kevin, and Keith. And thank you to all of you for giving us your time and attention in season two of the Plant-Strong Podcast. Don't fret. Over the next several weeks, we have some bonus episodes coming your way that are going to include some additional inspirational transformational stories from people, many of them just like you.

Rip Esselstyn:

And if you're ready to set some personal performance goals for 2021, stay tuned. We are cooking up some ideas for setting that triathlon that you've been thinking about in motion. And the best part, you will be able to participate. In the meantime, register for our Plant-Strong Primer Kitchen Rescue Event from October 23rd to the 24th, and keep in touch with all things Plant-Strong at plantstrongpodcast.com. Thanks.

Rip Esselstyn:

Thank you for listening and subscribing to our show. I want you to know that we read each and every one of your reviews, and we appreciate each and every one. If you want to learn more about this season or today's guests and sponsors, please visit plantstrongpodcast.com. Plant-Strong Podcast team includes Lauri Kortowich, Ami Mackey, Patrick Gavin, Wade Clark, and Carrie Barrett. I want to thank my parents, Dr. Caldwell B. Esselstyn, JR., and Ann Crile Esselstyn for creating a legacy that will be carried on for generations, and being willing to go against the current and trudge upstream to causation. We are all indebted for it.