

Rip Esselstyn:

Does anybody else find it challenging to live Plant-Strong in a world that isn't? Our upcoming Plant-Strong primer event will be live and online from October 23rd to the 24th. It's called Kitchen Rescue because it's dedicated to helping you haul out the pantry, makeover your menus and discover the joy in Plant-Strong cooking as we head into the holiday season. Whether you've been living this way for a while or if you're brand-spanking-new to the lifestyle, this event is a great opportunity for our community to come together, take a break from the election headlines and talk candidly about our favorite foods with you, our favorite friends.

Rip Esselstyn:

Let's hop in the kitchen and make it happen. I would encourage you to invite a family member, roll up your sleeves together and join in the fun. Visit Primer.PlantStrong.com to register today. And hey, if you can't watch it live, no sweat. Every ticket includes video access for a full year after the event.

Rip Esselstyn:

I want to welcome you to another bonus transformation Tuesday episode of the Plant-Strong podcast. If you're on the fence about joining our upcoming Kitchen Rescue event from October 23rd to the 24th, I know you're going to benefit from hearing stories of people just like you who kick-started their own health recovery with the help of many of the Engine 2 Plant-Strong resources that we have to offer. You don't have to go it alone. And as you're going to hear in today's episode, you may even get to bring your whole family along for the ride with you.

Rip Esselstyn:

Mark Papa and his wife Amy are the quintessential normal family from Pennsylvania. In 2019, Mark very begrudgingly joined one of our Engine 2 seven-day immersion programs which catapulted this former meat-eating triathlete back to fitness. Mark is a type one diabetic. He's in the restaurant business and he and his wife have five kids. If there was ever a family that had excuses not to change, this is it. And yet, they did. And as you can predict, the results have been remarkable.

Rip Esselstyn:

I caught up with Mark and Amy last year when I visited with them at their home outside of Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania. We talk about what life was like for the Papa family going into the immersion and what life is like now. And believe me, it's been quite an adventure, as you're going to hear. Welcome Mark Papa and his wife, Amy.

Rip Esselstyn:

Why don't we start by ... Could you just talk about where you were maybe a month or two before going to the immersion?

Mark Papa:

Yeah. I was a heavy meat-eater. I'm a type one diabetic that was diagnosed later in life. I was easily 90 pounds overweight, kind of lost with my lifestyle, lost of being a parent. My activity was always down. Certainly would say that I was an emotional eater and was on that vicious cycle of I feel miserable so I'm eating and I would eat more and I would feel miserable. My diabetes was out of control, more than I'd want to admit. I was just lost in my whole lifestyle with it.

Rip Esselstyn:

And how old are you now?

Mark Papa:

I am 46.

Rip Esselstyn:

46. And how old were you when you were diagnosed with type one diabetes?

Mark Papa:

I was 38.

Rip Esselstyn:

Okay. 38.

Mark Papa:

Yes.

Rip Esselstyn:

So, things started to spiral a little bit between the diabetes, being overweight and just this vicious cycle. And then what role did Amy play in suggesting that you go to this Engine 2 immersion program?

Mark Papa:

Amy has always been amazingly supportive. And even whenever I would look in a mirror and feel down on myself or be frustrated with things, she would always tell me, "You look amazing. You're fine. I love you." And I would say approximately two months before the immersion, Amy started throwing hints out there of, "I'm worried about you. I'm worried about your lifestyle. I'm worried about your health. We have," ... at that point ... "a one year-old daughter that ... she's going to need her dad around. I'm worried about your diabetes."

Mark Papa:

Amy started encouraging me on, "You're great. You're beautiful. You're perfect. Let's make you greater, more beautiful, more perfect."

Rip Esselstyn:

Amy, can you speak to that for a second? From your vantage point ...

Amy Papa:

Yes.

Rip Esselstyn:

... were you nervous about ...

Amy Papa:

Yes.

Rip Esselstyn:

... Mark's state? And you've got five kids and, "Oh my gosh. I don't want to be a single mother."

Amy Papa:

We actually had a conversation about a month before the immersion where I looked him in the eyes and said, "I'm scared. I'm scared that you are going to have a heart attack. I'm scared that you are going to leave me with these five children. I'm scared that where you're going is going to leave me alone." And that was tough because I risked upsetting him even more or deflating him even more but I knew it was necessary. And when talk came of the immersion and his dad and his stepmother, Cindy, really started saying, "You know, Mark, you should think about doing this," I said, "You have to. This is something you have to do. Do it for you, do it for us. This is your lifeline."

Rip Esselstyn:

And up until what point were you still trying to get out of going to the immersion?

Mark Papa:

We had to check in on a Monday at the immersion, afternoon. And I think Sunday night I was still trying to come up with how I could dodge this thing without upsetting my family with it.

Rip Esselstyn:

What do you think was behind that? Was it just, "I got this," or, "I'm afraid of the change."? What do you think it was?

Mark Papa:

I think, first of all, it was being uncomfortable; that I know I'm going to have to make a significant change and I don't know that I'm strong enough and I'm too tired to do it. I think there was the conceited cockiness, as you said, that when it's time for me to do this, I'll do it on my own. I don't need strangers or parents telling me what to do with it. And then there was ... The third part of it is I've eaten meat all my life. I like meat. And I didn't want to make a lifestyle change on it. That Sunday before, I was loading up on pizza and burgers because I thought, "For the next five days, I'm going to eat leaves so let's get me as full as I can be before I go."

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah, yeah. At what point into the five day immersion were you like, "Wow, I had this all wrong. This is actually a really wonderful experience. I'm learning a lot and I think I'll gain control over my diabetes and my lifestyle and all that."?

Mark Papa:

In my ear right there, Amy was saying the second I walked into it. I think it certainly was in the beginning where ... One of the things that amazed me most was the personal side of it. We've talked about ...

before going to the immersion ... and we were part of, "If you buy the Weight Watcher program. If you ... " In fact, Amy said several times, "Let's look into Jenny Craig or Nutrisystem."

Amy Papa:

I was forcing him.

Mark Papa:

They have Mayo and they have diabetic-

Amy Papa:

[inaudible 00:09:05][crosstalk 00:09:05]-

Mark Papa:

-and all of this. The immersion sold me immediately because it wasn't, "If you buy our product, this is going to happen." It was, "If you live this lifestyle, you can do this." It was about just eating the most basic things for you. "You don't have to buy my stuff. Go buy a head of lettuce. Go buy a head of kale. Go buy rice. Go buy quinoa." It wasn't, "Buy Engine 2," although that makes it much easier. It wasn't, "Do ..." There weren't plugs in it where you ... I never felt like this was a sales pitch of, "Okay, how can they keep doing it?"

Mark Papa:

The second part of it was-

Rip Esselstyn:

It didn't feel too commercial. I like that. Yeah.

Mark Papa:

It wasn't commercial. Actually, the least part. And that's what I was really going to allude to ... was I kept telling Amy how personal it was; that I didn't feel like a client or a number. I felt like Mark and I felt like I was important to the whole thing where it was, "This team cares about me and my wellbeing genuinely." That really sparked my interest. I still think of the slide of you presenting the transformation from the caterpillar into the butterfly.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. That metamorphosis.

Mark Papa:

Absolutely. And I don't think it ... It caught my attention but it didn't make sense until I was the butterfly and then it was easy to look back and be like, "Wow." And I'm still, Rip ... I'm still absolutely amazed at how 10 years of unhealthy living, eating attitude was so quickly washed away and incurred in five days; where it was, "Okay, I can do this."

Mark Papa:

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I had shared with you ... In 2009, I ran the Pittsburgh marathon and I was doing triathlons and I had told you I'd gotten a tattoo of a triathlon symbols on my arm and-

Rip Esselstyn:

Was it running, swimming and biking? Is that what it was?

Mark Papa:

It was.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah.

Mark Papa:

In a triangle of ... It had a runner, a swimmer and a cyclist on there. And I thought those days were just gone. And in fact, I had the design made for the cover-up tattoo that I was embarrassed of having it on my arm. And Amy was like, "I don't think you should do that. I don't think you should do it. I don't think you should cover it." I'm like, "It's embarrassing on my arm. It's ..." And now I have a triathlon on a fat arm and it's even worse with it.

Rip Esselstyn:

Can you show us that ...

Mark Papa:

Absolutely.

Rip Esselstyn:

The tattoo? Gotcha.

Amy Papa:

There's ...

Mark Papa:

The swimmer.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah, yeah.

Amy Papa:

The runner.

Mark Papa:

The runner. And the cyclist.

Amy Papa:

Wow.

Rip Esselstyn:

And what's that in the middle of it?

Amy Papa:

That's a cross.

Mark Papa:

A cross.

Rip Esselstyn:

Gotcha. Gotcha.

Mark Papa:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

Wow. Cool. Thank you.

Mark Papa:

Absolutely. Amy had said, "Why don't you wait? Don't do it." So, I pushed it off. And going to the immersion, I remember being scared of having to ... of go on a hike in the morning. And I went with your sister and I thought, "I don't even know if I'm going to be able to do this whole thing." And I was able to get through it. And then just as we sat and we kept talking, I realized this is not only doable, it's enjoyable. The meals were amazing at the immersion. I remember telling my stepmother, Cindy, whenever it was time for lunch, like, "Are these people feeding us again? I'm not even hungry." And you would go down and the food was just ... And I keep teasing the bountiful and plentiful, but there's no other ways to do it. The food was bountiful and plentiful. I don't remember the last time I ate so many colors and just absolutely being ... I don't want to use stuffed but filled. Filled and not feeling disgusted.

Mark Papa:

Yes. Amy had just said, "satisfied." Like, "Wow, I feel really good. I'm full. I'm not hungry in the least bit and now it's dinner time." And you have to go eat and it really ... as funny and ironic as it is for me, I think the biggest thing with the immersion was I kept thinking, "Oh, I have to eat again. I'm so full!" And I was the one going in there thinking, "I'm probably going to die of starvation of the next couple days."

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. And you had all the pizza and the burgers going into it.

Mark Papa:

Absolutely. Loaded up on it, yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

It's interesting because I have found ... And it's been a long time since I ate that way, but you used to eat that way and you would finish a meal and almost feel like you had a bowling ball in your stomach.

Mark Papa:

Absolutely.

Rip Esselstyn:

You feel just like ...

Mark Papa:

Yes.

Rip Esselstyn:

... whoa. And now, even when I "over-eat" I still feel light and unencumbered and not completely drained and tired and I got to go take a nap or something like that.

Mark Papa:

Yeah, absolutely. And I think at home it's dinners that I really feel it; that Amy will make a beautiful dinner and in the past I'd be like, "Oh, I'm so tired. I'm going to go sit on a chair and I'll watch something." And now Amy will make dinner and I feel even more energized. I'm like, "Okay, I'm going outside. I want to get something done." Or I'm going to go outside and play basketball with the kids or do something.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah.

Mark Papa:

So, absolutely.

Rip Esselstyn:

Amy, did Mark call you at all during the immersion program to check in and say, "Hey, honey. You know what? This isn't as bad as I thought it would be,"?

Amy Papa:

Yes, I waited ... That first day that he got there I was a nervous wreck and I thought, "The first time I talk to him, I'm going to know right away if this is good or if I'm going to be disappointed." And immediately he was like, "This is awesome." And he would send me pictures of his meals and, "Look at what I'm eating. Look how beautiful. Look at this. This is amazing." And we'd talk at night and he was just so encouraged and so ... "Okay, I got to go. We're practicing for the talent show." And I just ...

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah.

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Amy Papa:

... was so encouraged by him and how excited he was.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah.

Amy Papa:

It was great.

Rip Esselstyn:

It really is like a camp for adults.

Mark Papa:

Yes.

Rip Esselstyn:

Right?

Amy Papa:

I was very jealous I wasn't there.

Rip Esselstyn:

Well, we're sorry you weren't there, too.

Amy Papa:

I know.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah.

Amy Papa:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

I'm interested to know, were you at all plant-based before Mark went into this?

Amy Papa:

No.

Rip Esselstyn:

No?

Amy Papa:

No. And-

Rip Esselstyn:

How did you hear about the immersion or plant-based living?

Amy Papa:

We heard about all of this through his stepmother, Cindy, who had been living the lifestyle for quite a while before he went to the immersion. And she had encouraged us many times to adopt of the lifestyle. And I was one of those busy moms of five who had a million reasons and excuses as to why that wasn't going to work and, "Have you tried cooking for this many kids? There's no way." Again, ticked off a million excuses. And when I got to be so concerned about Mark's health I thought, "Okay, I'll do this for him. I will adopt this lifestyle for him to ensure that he comes home and sticks with it and follows it."

Amy Papa:

It was a commitment on my end but more for his benefit than mine. And it was about a week into it where I was absolutely sold. I thought, "Nevermind for him. I'm doing it now for me because I truly see a miraculous change in how I feel, how I look, my energy level." It sold itself on me just by living it.

Rip Esselstyn:

And as a mother of five children, how hard was it for you to make this a reality in the house? Because I think I've heard you say every excuse in the book why I couldn't do this was-

Amy Papa:

Right.

Rip Esselstyn:

-five kids and being busy. But now you're like, "This is like ... I got this."

Amy Papa:

I got this. We can do ... If I can do it-

Rip Esselstyn:

What advice would you give-

Amy Papa:

-anyone can do it.

Rip Esselstyn:

-for somebody that's out there saying, "It's too hard. It's too expensive. Five kids. It's an impossibility."

Amy Papa:

The way I started to look at it is valuing my health and my body. It's important, so you know what? If it takes me two days to grocery shop because I'm going to multiple places, my body's worth it and my

children are worth it. I started saying, "You know what? As a family, we are going to embrace how important this is."

Amy Papa:

The children started to see, with Mark and I, just how encouraged we were. They started to see how good we feel. And it became a curiosity on their part where they wanted to join us in what we're eating. And now it has just become the new norm that this is what's in our pantry, this is what's in our refrigerator, this is what our dinners look like. It wasn't an all at once thing; it was a gradual process. But yeah ...

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah.

Amy Papa:

I don't know what else to say about that.

Rip Esselstyn:

And what are the ages of your children?

Amy Papa:

Our oldest is 14 and then we have our second son, who just turned 13. We have a son who's eight, who's going to be turning nine in about two weeks. Then we have a four year-old and then our youngest is a little girl and she's a year and a half.

Rip Esselstyn:

That's quite a spread.

Amy Papa:

Yes. We have them nice and spread out.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. Wow. Bravo to you guys.

Amy Papa:

Yeah. Thank you.

Rip Esselstyn:

That's amazing. I'd love to get back to Mark. You're type one diabetic. Going into the immersion, can you tell us what you were using as far as how much insulin per grams of carbohydrates and how that worked?

Mark Papa:

Yeah. With being a diabetic, there are two numbers that you have to work with. One is your sensitivity and that's for every unit of insulin you take, how many points does your blood sugar drop? The second is

your insulin to carb ratio, which is how many carbs you eat, how much insulin you need. And I was going into the immersion at about ... for every five carbs I would eat, I needed a unit of insulin and for every unit of insulin I would take for my points, I think it was like one to 15. So, for every one unit of insulin I would take, my blood sugar would drop down 15 points with it.

Rip Esselstyn:

Got it, got it.

Mark Papa:

All right? And diabetes type one is an illness, disease, whatever you want to call it, where there's just a lot of thinking.

Rip Esselstyn:

I think auto-immune disease might be ... Yeah.

Mark Papa:

Absolutely. And I do want to just run back real quick, Rip.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah.

Mark Papa:

You had asked about the immersion and something that really sold me ... Before I went to the immersion, for a small window, I had an a-ha moment where I emailed the Engine 2 team and I'm thinking it's some conglomerate, whatever. It'll go through seven layers of people. And I had just said, "Hey, I'm coming to the immersion in North Carolina. I guess at this point I'm looking forward to it," with my eyes rolled. "But more so, I am a 46 year-old with type one diabetes. My" ... at that point, 12, but ... "My 13 year-old son is a type one also, and I know I'm not any kind of example for him. If anything, I'm an example of, 'Okay, don't do this with your diabetes if you want to be healthy.'"

Mark Papa:

The second one, I had told you, was I had a one year-old daughter. And again, I'm 46 and I thought, "If this little girl gets married when she's 30, I'm going to have to be 76 to walk her down the aisle." And I knew at that point, I'm not going to make it. It's just reality. I'm not trying to be doom and gloom. I just knew I'm not going to live to 76 with diabetes and my lifestyle. Okay, whatever with it. And I remember on night one you said to me ... because you had saw my name on my badge ... "Hey, I got your email. I'd love to talk to you." And I told Amy ... I was like, "Rip said he wants to talk to me. Do you believe that? Like, it's Rip." And a little of flattering, humbling, embarrassing that here's Rip that wants to speak with you. And I laugh now because now he's in my house. But Rip actually cared and wanted to speak with me and took the time. And that's what this whole Engine 2 things is to me, with it. Yeah.

Mark Papa:

So, going into it, my diabetes was just way out of control. And again, mine ... I was like, "Meh, whenever it's time to get it under control, I'll get it under control." But I knew deep down I am spiraling and I don't know how to get out of this with as many different avenues as I tried.

Rip Esselstyn:

And at what point in the immersion did you start noticing some differences with your type one diabetes and the amount of insulin and carbohydrates?

Mark Papa:

Absolutely. I use a pump and with a pump, typically I would put three days worth of insulin in it. And then they want you to change the sites where it connected to your body. Instead of taking shots, I just constantly have insulin pumped into me with it. It's supposed to be better for you except for my pump must have been faulty because it didn't work for me with my diabetes. It had nothing to do with my lifestyle, of course. But I was constantly changing these sites, like every two days. And I was irritated, I was scarred up from it, but whatever, this is diabetes.

Mark Papa:

In the immersion, I had put a new site on Sunday night, leave for the immersion on Monday and I think it was four days into it that I was like, "Man, I haven't changed my site since I've been here," and I still had a day's worth of insulin left in my pump where normally I was running out after two days. I was on day four and it was the first time since I had been using a pump that I had to throw insulin away just because I had to change my pump with it. That was the realization and the tangible evidence of I'm using way less insulin than I normally have. And ironically ... And we had spoken about it. Again, diabetes is all based off carbs and everyone will tell you, you want to eat the least amount of carbs possible. I tripled my carbs once I was at the immersion with the food that I was eating there.

Rip Esselstyn:

And once people truly understand what's at the root causation of type two diabetes and then understand about insulin sensitivity and insulin resistance, you realize how by eating a low fat, whole food, plant-based diet that's high in carbohydrates, low in fat and the perfect amount of protein, your insulin sensitivity goes through the roof. And now, if I'm not mistaken, your insulin sensitivities gone up ... What? Is it 300%?

Mark Papa:

Yes.

Rip Esselstyn:

Is it something like that?

Mark Papa:

That's exactly where, again, my sensitivity ... I think I was on 15 to one and now it's 50 to one, so my one unit of insulin would drop me 15 points. Now it drops me 50 points because I react to insulin ... My carb ratio has doubled. Where it was in the eight to ones ... I think, even, at one point it might have been five to one, now I am on 10 and 12 to one with it. And again, at that point in my dark times of diabetes as I sometimes look at it, I was eating maybe 90 carbs a day. Of those 90 carbs, I'll boast that 15 of them were probably vegetables. Now I'm eating easily 250 carbs a day and it's all plant-based.

Rip Esselstyn:

Right. What else has happened since you left the immersion? We're now three months out.

Mark Papa:

Three months out.

Rip Esselstyn:

Your insulin sensitivity has gone up dramatically. You're using a fraction of what you were before.

Mark Papa:

I am.

Rip Esselstyn:

And then what are you down, weight wise?

Mark Papa:

I crossed the 50 pound mark. I just passed the 50 pound mark of being down on it. I am proudly not covering the triathlon tattoo with it. I do have aspirations. Since the immersion, I went to our local bike shop. I purchased a bike, so I've been riding again. And in fact, whenever I was there, the shop owner couldn't believe ... I was like, "I need everything." I threw everything away. Helmet, shoes, shorts, everything. It wasn't just buy a bike; it was I need to buy everything again because I thought this life was over.

Rip Esselstyn:

And what do people that are maybe co-workers ... It sounds like your family is super supportive, but maybe friends, neighbors, what do they think about what's happened to Mark Papa and this crazy lifestyle? And the fact that you're not eating meat anymore?

Mark Papa:

Yeah. People would question. "Okay, so you're eating vegan now?" And I'd be like, "Yes." And they'd say, "So you don't eat meat." And I'm like, "Well, of course not. No." "So, do you have fish?" And I'd say, "Well, no. I don't eat fish, either." So they'd say, "Well, you must really pile on the yogurt." And I'm like, "Well, I don't have dairy." "Oh, so you just drink milk?" "Well, no. Milk is dairy." So they'd say, "So, for breakfast then, you must eat a lot of eggs?" And I'm still like, "Well, I don't have eggs because there's only two things wrong with the eggs, as Rip said; the whites and the yoke." And they're like, "Oh, so ..." And I was like, "And we don't have oil." And they're like, "Oh, so what ..."

Rip Esselstyn:

This is getting prettier and prettier.

Mark Papa:

Right. And they're like, "Well, where do you get your protein?" And that's famous from the immersion. I'm not really sure. I don't know. Beans or something.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah.

Mark Papa:

I said, "But I'm not worry about being protein deficient, I'll tell you."

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah.

Mark Papa:

Yeah. I think so many times my friends always want to look at the scary, negative side of, "Oh, what do you eat?" But once you start talking about what you do eat ... "Well, we have a lot of rice. We have a lot of quinoa. We have a lot of kale. We have a lot of other greens. We have ... Amy makes a delicious stuffed peppers, lasagna." My wife was an amazing cook and ironically, she's become even better once we've gone plant-based where the foods are ... Now dinner isn't, "Oh, I got to eat dinner," or whatever. Dinner now is always amazing and you feel even more amazing after you eat it, where you get up feeling ... I feel energized, not sluggish.

Rip Esselstyn:

Amy, will you talk for just a sec about your experience cooking the way you used to cook and now the way you're cooking? And maybe the variety in the colors and the textures and all that?

Amy Papa:

Absolutely. I dreaded cooking dinner before we went plant-based. Now that we're doing plant-based, I feel like there is so much more creativity. Every meal that I make is new because you can throw in whatever you want. I might put in a different bean in this one this time, maybe more rice than I did last time. I just have more creativity with it. And I feel like there's just so many more options because now instead of it just being a meat, a carb/starch and a vegetable, it's all the peppers and the mushrooms, the vegetables, the rice. Everything thrown together just makes it so much prettier and I love it now. I love the creativity factor of it. I love taking something and saying, "Okay, this looks good but what if I add this to it?"

Amy Papa:

And because it's all so new and exciting, we don't have that, "It's supposed to look like this and it's supposed to taste like this," so everybody's enjoying it that much more.

Rip Esselstyn:

What are some dishes that you're really excited about right now? Is there anything you've made recently that you're like, "Oh my gosh. That was a home run."? Or ...

Amy Papa:

Our ...

Rip Esselstyn:

... Any go-to dishes?

Amy Papa:

Stuffed peppers was something that was one of our favorites before and I knew it would be easy to make it compliant, plant-based just by swapping out the meat for rice and beans. I just made it the other night and it looked a million times better than the old way I used to make it. It was just prettier. And when we ate it I was like, "This is delicious." There was a huge sense of pride with it.

Mark Papa:

The kids asked for seconds.

Amy Papa:

Yes.

Rip Esselstyn:

Isn't that-

Amy Papa:

And our children loved it.

Rip Esselstyn:

-fun when you're the cook, you make it.

Amy Papa:

Yes.

Rip Esselstyn:

And then you go, "Oh my God. This is so good."

Amy Papa:

Yes! And I've started taking pictures of my dinners because I want ... and I send them to a lot of our friends because I want them to see this is ... look how pretty this is, but it was so easy. And it's so good and so healthy for you. And I just keep trying to be that person who is the example of, "Look, I did it. We just did it with five kids sitting at this table and it was easy and it was good."

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah.

Amy Papa:

Yeah. And mashed potatoes. That was the other thing that I thought ... That comfort food of having mashed potatoes with so many different things we were used to eating and went on and looked at plant-based mashed ... Like how do I make this compliant? And it was so easy, just using the water that the potatoes cook in and mashing them up. And the first several times we had mashed potatoes, the kids didn't even realize that there was no dairy in it and that it was a compliant plant-based ...

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah.

Amy Papa:

When you add that to anything, it makes it good.

Rip Esselstyn:

With your son who's type one diabetic ...

Amy Papa:

Yes. Dylan is type one diabetic.

Rip Esselstyn:

Dylan. You call him D?

Amy Papa:

Dill.

Mark Papa:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

Dill.

Amy Papa:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

Dill, Dill, Dill. Talk about how you want him to own this.

Amy Papa:

Yes.

Rip Esselstyn:

You're not forcing it on him.

Amy Papa:

Yes.

Rip Esselstyn:

And it sounds like he's doing one compliant meal ...

Amy Papa:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rip Esselstyn:

... at least, a day. Right?

Amy Papa:

Yes. Yes.

Rip Esselstyn:

Can you talk about that?

Amy Papa:

Absolutely. When Mark came back from the immersion and, as a family, we sat down and said, "Here are some changes that are going to be happening. Mom and dad are going to be eating plant-based. This is how we're going to do it. This is what it looks like. This is the foods we're eliminating from our diet. But these are the foods that we're adding to our diet." And showing, like Mark was saying, not what we can't eat but what we are eating. We decided that we were not going to force our children to eat a plant-based diet; that we wanted them to observe it for themselves and when they were ready, when they saw the benefits for themselves, they would choose to eat the way we were eating.

Amy Papa:

We had a special interest in Dylan, of course, because we saw how the plant-based diet was positively impacting Mark's diabetes, that we knew he was the one we really were pushing to accept it first. It's funny how things work out because our oldest son ... because he is so athletic, immediately was interested, intrigued. He's eating a lot like us. But Dylan, our type one diabetic, we talked to him and said, "How about trying one compliant meal a deal? We'll let you pick if you want to do your breakfast, your lunch, your dinner. Look at what we're eating, decide for yourself." And so, he did.

Amy Papa:

He started with doing compliant breakfast and was like, "This is really good and I'm full and this is easy."

Rip Esselstyn:

What's a breakfast that he likes that's compliant?

Amy Papa:

He likes ... We have an oil-free bread what we found and he likes that. We'll toast it for him. And he likes oatmeal. He'll do the oatmeal, which is great. It's one of those two that he does.

Rip Esselstyn:

Lots of carbs there.

Amy Papa:

Yes.

Rip Esselstyn:

Right?

Amy Papa:

Yes.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah.

Amy Papa:

Amazing. Now that school has started, his lunches that I'm packing for him are also compliant and we are noticing a drastic difference in his blood sugars. Instead of running high, they're actually on the lower side, which means we can lower his insulin. And he's taking a lot less insulin with his meals. And he's so excited and encouraged by that because he ... Like Mark was saying, it's tangible evidence. He can look at those numbers and you see. You see the positive impact with your body. And he not sits down at lunch every day with his friends and is joking with them saying, "Look at my compliant lunch. Look, this is my vegan lunch." He's saying all these phrases and using those terms with his friends because he's proud of it.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah.

Amy Papa:

And that's exciting.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. Will both of you, for a second, talk about how, as a parent, and then also you, as a type one diabetic ... how scary it was, how horrific it was, having to go to the doctor's office? And just trying to figure that whole equation out. And as a mother, how you would sometimes be calling Mark up in tears because you were just ... As a mother, you want to protect and take care of your-

Amy Papa:

Yes.

Rip Esselstyn:

-children. And it seems like it's spiraling out of control.

Amy Papa:

I'll start and then I'll pass you the mic. Okay. Every three months, Dylan goes to Children's Hospital for his diabetes check-up appointment. And those appointments are extremely stressful as a parent, as a mother, because you're meeting with a dietician and a nutritionalist and you're meeting with these experts in diabetes. And it's a very humbling experience because no matter how good you think you're doing, you almost feel like you're being ripped apart because there's always so much more room for improvement.

Amy Papa:

And the last several appointments Dylan had, there were a few where I'd either call Mark or I'd leave and get in the van and just be in tears because you feel like a failure as a mom because his numbers aren't what they should be. His A1c wasn't where we need it to be. And you're trying to take the brunt of that so that he doesn't feel bad, and it's just a very deflating, unmotivating experience. And that's what I love about the plant-based lifestyle because you start to feel like you're back in control of your body.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. Yeah. And what's been your experience so far ... you, personally. I'm sure you have a different story, Amy, as far as, "With our son, Dylan, we're doing a little experiment with this plant-based thing." Are they supportive of that?

Amy Papa:

Yes.

Rip Esselstyn:

Or they think it's crazy?

Amy Papa:

No. They are supportive of it, although the first question any doctor ever asks us is, "Where do you get your protein? Where are you getting your protein?" It's the first thing out of their mouths. And once I explain and you justify where you know you're getting your nutrients and protein, then they're fine; then they were okay with it.

Amy Papa:

Again, I think it's hard for them to argue with the evidence of seeing his numbers and the difference in the amount of insulin that he's taking.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. To me, I hear that and I'm just like, "Wow, these doctors ..." It's just when they ask that question ... it's just ... it reinforces how ... unfortunately, how ignorant they are when it comes to nutrition and macro-nutrients and micro-nutrients and what is the true cause of insulin resistance and what's going on here that these supposed experts, in some ways, unfortunately don't know. Just like cardiologists. Instead of prescribing a low fat, whole food, plant-based diet, which we know can get to the root causation of heart disease, they're saying, "Let's do another procedure. Let's do a stent. Let's do some stat and drugs," because they don't give anybody the benefit of the doubt ... most don't ... that they can adhere to or do a silly, stupid, plant-based diet.

Rip Esselstyn:

How about you?

Mark Papa:

Yeah. I laugh whenever Amy says, "You have to try to convince, whether it be physicians or anyone, of where do you get your protein?" And I think, "Well, the largest animal, an elephant, doesn't eat meat. Where does it get its protein?" The diabetes appointments, they're very involved. And my experience

with it is it's ... right, wrong or indifferent, it's easy to push a diabetic appointment back on the patient because the patient is in control of what happens, meaning that I'm making the food choices, I'm making the insulin decisions. I'm doing all these things, where the physician can only guide you. So, when you get to the appointment, they're going to challenge the decisions that you made. And I get it's for the right reasons. Everybody wants to be healthy. But it's very humbling and very embarrassing, I think, because you're not doing the right thing with it.

Mark Papa:

There are so many times that Amy would call me crying, being at one of Dylan's appointment, that I'm like, "Well, who was it? I'm coming up there right now." You know, the macho dad. And she was like, "I'm not telling you. I'm just trying to vent." And going to my appointments, the only thing I regretted more than the night before the immersion were my diabetic appointments. I hated going to my appointments. They were just absolutely miserable. For me, it was because I knew better. I knew I wasn't eating healthy. I knew I wasn't exercising.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah.

Mark Papa:

And now you're going to tell me what I already know and I don't want to hear it. So, phew, made it through that diabetic appointment. It's over. I'm getting an ice cream cone on my way home as my reward for surviving that and I'll deal with it next time. Since the immersion, I had a diabetic appointment and ...

Rip Esselstyn:

How many have you had?

Mark Papa:

I've had one. And I remember walking into it thinking, "bring it. What are you going to tell me? Because I know."

Rip Esselstyn:

And this is a doctor you've been seeing for how long?

Mark Papa:

This is a doctor that I've been with for seven years.

Rip Esselstyn:

Okay.

Mark Papa:

And she was so impressed with the weight loss, with the insulin that I'm not taking and where I'm at. In fact, I remember her saying, "I wish more of my appointments were like this." And I was the first appointment of the day and she had said, "I'm so excited for the rest of my day now, to start it with

this." I didn't even know ... And I think of being on the immersion and Adam Sud talking with me about how people don't lose limbs and die from diabetes. They use limbs from the complications caused by diabetes. And he said, "It's not because they're not taking insulin. It's because they're no longer resistant to insulin." And that was exactly me, where it was I'm dumping all of this insulin and nothing's happening. Well, it's not going to because I had so many things in my body blocking the insulin.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. Yeah. Good. When's your next appointment? Do you know?

Mark Papa:

I have one in five weeks.

Rip Esselstyn:

Okay.

Mark Papa:

With it. Again, looking forward to it. Now it's a challenge of ... It's great going in where I feel like, "Okay, we are working together because I'm not sabotaging myself anymore." And now I'm going into it saying, "Okay, This is what's going on. What's your experience with someone that is a type one diabetic that wants to run a half-marathon?" And we can work together and plan that as opposed to, "I know what you're going to tell me. I know what I'm doing wrong."

Mark Papa:

Really, the physicians with me were at a point of, "We don't know what to tell you. If you keep eating the way you're eating, you can keep taking insulin but nothing's going to happen. You're not exercising, so, yeah."

Rip Esselstyn:

Let's talk about the future.

Mark Papa:

Okay.

Rip Esselstyn:

Short-term future.

Mark Papa:

Absolutely.

Rip Esselstyn:

One of your goals ... in May, you want to do a ... you're going to do a half-marathon.

Mark Papa:

Yes.

Rip Esselstyn:

Right?

Mark Papa:

Absolutely.

Rip Esselstyn:

With your son.

Mark Papa:

Yes.

Rip Esselstyn:

When are you and I going to do what I did with Joe Inga to end the first season of the Plant-Strong podcast? When are you and I going to do a triathlon?

Mark Papa:

There is nothing more exciting to think about doing a triathlon because the only thing I like more than running and the only thing I'm better at than cycling is sinking like a rock in a pool. So, to think I get to swim with a world record-setting triathlete is just so encouraging. I know whenever we were talking about this and Laurie had said, "Is there a pool nearby?" And I was like, "No."

Rip Esselstyn:

I looked it up. There is.

Mark Papa:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

There's the YMCA five miles away.

Mark Papa:

It's closed. Absolutely. I look forward to the challenge and ...

Amy Papa:

You tell him when.

Rip Esselstyn:

What about we go for Summer of 2020?

Mark Papa:

Let's do it.

Rip Esselstyn:

All right.

Mark Papa:

I'm in.

Rip Esselstyn:

Okay. We'll do it. We'll either have it back at the Esselstyn family farm or we will pick an existing triathlon and we'll sign up and we'll do it.

Mark Papa:

Absolutely. Absolutely.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah.

Amy Papa:

[inaudible 00:45:31].

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. Yeah, yeah. You're in the restaurant business. Any thoughts that potentially you might do something in the plant-based space? Because we could all use more options when it comes to healthy plant-based restaurants.

Mark Papa:

Absolutely.

Rip Esselstyn:

And then because of ... I've heard the stories of you building a shed in the backyard and building this great pond here. And you get into things and you dive in. You're all in and you just have this attitude where, "I'm going to figure it out. I may mess up along the way, but I'm going to figure it out." You know how to do restaurants. Is this something that potentially we can look forward to?

Mark Papa:

Yes. I am ...

Rip Esselstyn:

And I want you to know, I understand it's a huge undertaking so I don't want to put you on the spot, but then again, I kind of do.

Mark Papa:

Yeah, no. I think what would be a great idea is to do a triathlon with you around the restaurant. No, I am encouraged because if I can ... Look, I would love to be able to encourage, inspire, help one person

based off of my story. This almost seems surreal. It's very humbling. There's so many times I look at the blessing of, "Why me?" In a positive of, "How did I get to be involved with these special people?" And I don't want to waste that opportunity. And even more so, Amy and I have talked about, I and we don't want to be selfish with it.

Mark Papa:

If I have the knowledge of being able to operate restaurants and Amy certainly has the recipes now, why not put it out there? Why not give folks the opportunity where if we can show them one meal, it's not scary, and when you leave this restaurant you're not going to be hungry, then we would absolutely explore the possibility of another great partnership with Amy and me of trying to open up a plant-based restaurant in western Pennsylvania.

Rip Esselstyn:

When you say another great partnership and the other partnership is husband and wife and the family and all that?

Mark Papa:

Absolutely. To be encouraged, married 17 years, five children, and to ... Even when I was in my darkest times, again, to have someone that was there for me, encouraging me, not criticizing me, made it so much easier, so much better. I know that ... I sure hope it's the norm for everybody, but I know how great it was for me. And Amy and I, even this morning, were talking about if there's anything we can do to help promote this lifestyle of it's doable, it's attainable. From a type one diabetic to a mother of five, that it can happen.

Rip Esselstyn:

And what has happened to your relationship since you've gotten healthier? Has your attitude changed? Are you guys ... Over the food and the meals, have you gotten closer in that sense? Anything there?

Mark Papa:

Yeah. First of all, my whole psyche has changed because I'm no longer avoiding mirrors or down on myself. Just a couple days ago, I was having a bad day and Amy kept encouraging me to go for a run; that I would feel better. Ironically, as many things as Amy and I share and live life together, the triathlons were always mine. The running is mine. The exercising is mine. The diabetes is mine. I'm with it. This is one of the first things in this arena of our life that we keep saying, "We're doing this together." The whole thing. This whole plant-based thing is we're doing this as a team. We're in it together with it.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah.

Amy Papa:

I was just going to say the same exact thing. A lot of Mark's adventures have been me supporting him on the sidelines, being there to watch him run the race or encourage him to exercise or be active. But it's been me as the cheerleader and him as the participant and this lifestyle, this way of living, is the first thing I think we've done as a couple where we have started it together, we're in it together, and we're seeing the benefits together. It's funny because we've actually talked about that several times; that this

is the first time where I feel like a partnership in that we're both the participants and we're both the cheerleaders.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. What a great adventure you're embarking on with this.

Amy Papa:

Yes.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

Seeing how Mark and Amy have navigated the Plant-Strong lifestyle since leaving the immersion program, seeing how they have overcome all of the hurdles that have been put before them ... And just so you know, that's a real word. It's a combination of hurdles and obstacles. Seeing how they have overcome these hurdles just makes me smile ear to ear and it makes all the work and the effort that we put into throwing these programs 100% worthwhile. And it is my grand hope and dream that in 2021 that Mark can join me and those New York City firefighters in a triathlon once this COVID-19 has blown over. Or some other multi-sport adventure race. So, stay tuned for that.

Rip Esselstyn:

In the meantime, join my family at The Knob outside of Cleveland for our next virtual event, the Plant-Strong Kitchen Rescue from October 23rd to the 24th. Primer.PlantStrong.com for all the details. Next week, we're back with another bonus Transformation Tuesday episode. Until then, peace, Engine 2. Keep it Plant-Strong.

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. The Plant-Strong podcast team includes Lori Kortowich, Amy Mackey, Patrick Gavin, Wade Clark and Carrie Barret. 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 the causation. We are all better for it.