

A case in point

Adam Lucas suffered from crippling colitis for years — until he discovered the healing power of diet and acupuncture

When Adam

Lucas developed a fever with stomach pain and diarrhoea in 2009, at the age of 26, his doctor put it down to a bout of gastroenteritis—an infection of the gut—and, sure enough, Adam recovered in a couple of weeks. But when his symptoms returned a year later while he was studying to become a teacher, and didn't go away, Adam received a much more serious diagnosis: inflammatory bowel disease (IBD)—an autoimmune disorder that causes chronic inflammation of the gastrointestinal system.

"I had a colonoscopy [when the colon is examined with a tiny camera], which confirmed I had colitis—inflammation of the colon—although the gastroenterologist wasn't sure if it was ulcerative colitis or Crohn's colitis," said the Londoner, now 35.

Ulcerative colitis is inflammation of the colon and usually also the rectum; along with Crohn's disease, which can affect any part of the gastrointestinal tract, it's one of the major forms of IBD. Crohn's colitis is a form of Crohn's disease that only affects the colon.

"Doctors seemed fixated on what to call my condition," said Adam, "But ultimately the treatment was the same: powerful drugs."

Over the next two and a half years, Adam tried nearly every drug the NHS had to offer for his colitis, from anti-inflammatory aminosalicylates and anti-TNF therapy to immunosuppressants routinely taken by patients with organ transplants. "Nothing really worked, so the medication kept increasing in terms of potency and toxicity," said Adam. "One drug even specified that you should not have children within a year of taking it—it was that toxic."

The only medication that helped his symptoms, which included dramatic weight loss, fevers, bloody diarrhoea and bowel movements up to 15 times a day, was steroids, specifically the drug prednisolone, but it was not meant to be a long-term treatment. "I was supposed to just be on an eight-week course," said Adam, "but I was on the drug for two years. Every time they tried to wean me off it, I'd get unwell again and have to go back on it."

The instability of Adam's condition meant that although he'd qualified as a teacher, he couldn't get a full-time job. He also had to give up being a drummer in a band. "It was too difficult to carry on with the lifestyle ... the touring, the late-night gigs, the staying in hotels."

An extra-low point came in the summer of 2012, when Adam had another colonoscopy to see if the medication he was on had resulted in any improvements. "The gastroenterologist said that none of the medication had worked. The colitis was still moderate to severe, and the only option now was surgery to remove part of my bowel."

The surgery, which would involve the creation of a 'J-pouch' to serve as a replacement large intestine, "can be a complete cure for some people," Adam was told. But it comes with significant risks, the most common one being pouchitis, inflammation of the J-pouch, which can cause diarrhoea, abdominal pain, cramps, fever, and increased bowel movements—the same symptoms as the condition it's meant to treat.

Pouchitis is a complication that's been reported to occur in about a quarter to nearly half of the people who have the procedure.¹

Adam refused the surgery. "There was no way I was going to risk getting pouchitis," said Adam. "I told the gastroenterologist, 'Thanks, but I'm going to try my own thing.'"

A self-healing approach

Adam set about trying to find an alternative way to deal with his condition—researching online and reading about the experiences of other colitis sufferers on internet forums. He quickly came across a book called *Self Healing Crohn's and Colitis* by David Klein and decided to give Klein's 'vegan diet healing plan' a try.

The diet was extreme—it involved eating only certain raw fruits and a small amount of steamed root vegetables—but Adam was willing to try anything. "At this point I'd come off all my medication and was completely housebound. It was bed, toilet, bed, toilet ... there were only a few hours in the afternoon that I felt well enough to get up."

After consulting with Klein via Skype, Adam started on the mainly fruitarian diet, and within three weeks he noticed a shift. "The frequency of my bowel movements reduced, and I started to feel a bit better," said Adam. After six weeks, Adam experienced further improvements. His bowel movements decreased to two to four times a day, his stomach pain and cramps disappeared and, for the first time in a year, he saw no blood when he went to the toilet. "It was amazing," said Adam.

However, the down side was that Adam's weight plummeted.

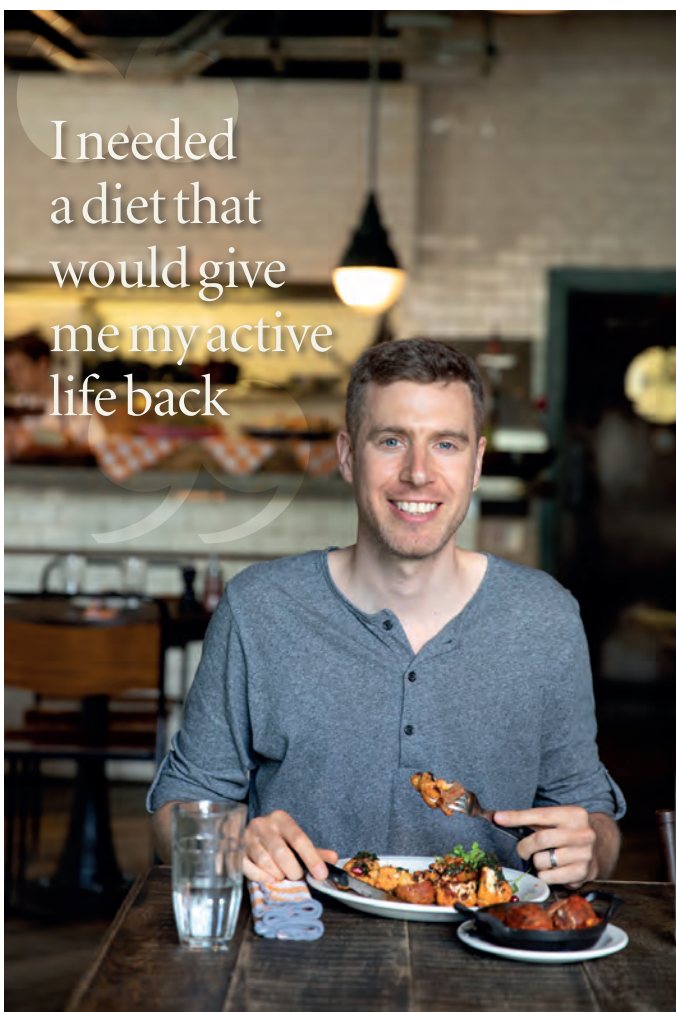
"I went from being 73 kg to just over 50 kg. I felt great on the inside, but on the outside I looked really ill. Friends would come to visit me and I could see the shock on their faces. Some would even start crying. I looked like a skeleton."

Adam also felt constantly cold. It was the middle of winter, but even indoors with "two thermal trousers under my normal trousers, two thermal tops underneath a T-shirt-jumper-jacket combo, plus a scarf", Adam still couldn't get warm.

But Adam persevered, as his priority was healing his

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colitis, and the weight loss was “all part of the process.” “The first phase is the healing phase. Then there’s the second phase, which is where you build your diet back up again,” said Adam.

To assist with the first phase, and to escape the single-figure temperatures of London, Adam booked himself into Finca de Vida (‘farm of life’), an organic healing and rehabilitation farm in Costa Rica, where he had access to fresh, organic fruit and vegetables; warm, clean air; and experts in health and rehabilitation to support him. He practised yoga and tai chi daily on his balcony overlooking the jungle, and focused on rest, relaxation and nourishment. His colitis symptoms continued to fade, he no longer felt cold and his weight stabilized.

When Adam returned to the UK a month later, he felt ready to begin the second phase of Klein’s plan and started to introduce new foods into his diet, such as grains and legumes. However, Adam quickly saw his symptoms return, and in just a few weeks he had deteriorated so much he ended up in hospital—and back on “massive amounts” of steroids.

“I would call this period ‘Back to Square One’, but I’d never been in hospital care before, so ‘Square Zero’ seems more appropriate.”

Yet Adam remained positive and began to search for a different diet to manage his symptoms. “I’d seen that diet could have an impact. I just needed to find one that was low-risk, would work long-term and would give me my active life back.”

Going Paleo

Adam did eventually find what he was looking for—in the form of the Paleo Diet, a high-fat, low-carb diet similar to the one eaten by our Paleolithic ancestors. “A friend of mine with colitis introduced me to Paleo, which excludes grains, legumes, refined sugar and processed foods. It worked really well for him.”

After researching the diet himself, Adam was sold. “The science makes sense, and the foods that are cut out—dairy, grains and legumes—I know are the worst and most inflammatory for me.”

The high-protein aspect of the diet was a significant step away from the Klein plan Adam had been following, but he decided to try it. Happily, it was a good decision.

In a couple of months, Adam was completely symptom free. Although he was still on high-dose steroids, his digestive health was “better than I could ever remember pre- or post-diagnosis”, he said.

After four months on the new diet, Adam was able to come off the steroids, and his weight returned to a

A recipe for health

Throughout his illness, Adam was repeatedly told by doctors that diet could not significantly improve inflammatory bowel disease. Yet Adam is convinced that the Paleo diet was key to his recovery.

Popularized by Dr Loren Cordain in his 2002 book, *The Paleo Diet*, this approach focuses on eating the foods most likely consumed by our ancestors during the Paleolithic (Early Stone Age) era, starting about 2.5 million years ago: meat, fish, vegetables, fruits, nuts and seeds. More recently introduced foods, like grains, dairy and anything processed, are discouraged.

Here’s a basic list of what you can and can’t eat on the diet, from Dr Cordain’s website (www.thepaleodiet.com).

EAT	DON'T EAT
Grass-produced meats	Cereal grains
Fish/seafood	Legumes (including peanuts)
Fresh fruit and vegetables	Dairy
Eggs	Refined sugar
Nuts and seeds	Potatoes
Healthy oils (olive, walnut, flaxseed, macadamia, avocado, coconut)	Processed foods
	Salt
	Refined vegetable oils

Various Paleolithic-style diets now exist, and there is some disagreement between different camps over what foods to eat and what to avoid, but the diet can be adjusted according to your individual needs. Adam, for example, focuses on eating plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables, which he found to be beneficial while following the Klein plan, rather than lots of meat, although he does eat small portions of meat and fish daily.

Several studies suggest that a Paleo-style diet can have significant benefits for health, including improving glucose control in type 2 diabetes and lowering blood pressure in those with metabolic syndrome.¹

While there don’t appear to be any published clinical trials of the Paleo diet for inflammatory bowel disease, the specific carbohydrate diet (SCD), which is also free of grains, sugar and processed foods, was recently found to completely resolve severe ulcerative colitis in an adult female sufferer.² The SCD has also proved highly beneficial in long-term studies of children with Crohn’s disease.³

REFERENCES

- 1 Eur J Clin Nutr, 2015; 69: 944–8; Lipids Health Dis, 2014; 13: 160
- 2 Case Rep Gastroenterol, 2015; 9: 291–5
- 3 J Pediatr Gastroenterol Nutr, 2014; 58: 87–91; J Pediatr Gastroenterol Nutr, 2014; 59: 516–21

healthier 70 kg. “I started playing sport and seeing my friends again. The diet was much more manageable than the initial Klein plan. It was far less restrictive, so it didn’t prevent me from eating out and socializing.”

Still, Adam avoided staying out late and drinking alcohol—his priority was to stay well and lead a healthy lifestyle.

Getting the point

Having experienced remarkable improvements in his health through a change of diet, Adam became interested in nutritional therapy and decided to enrol at the College of Naturopathic Medicine, a training provider in nutrition and other natural therapies, with several colleges across the UK and Ireland, to learn more. It was during his studies there that he found the final piece of his health puzzle: acupuncture.

“All my major symptoms were gone—the diarrhoea, the bleeding, the fevers—but I didn’t feel 100 per cent well,” said Adam. “Once I started having acupuncture at the CNM student clinic, I felt so much better.”

And it’s a combination of acupuncture and the Paleo diet, along with Chinese herbs and cranial osteopathy, that have kept Adam medication-free for the past five years, he says. Despite suffering a ‘flare-up’ last year during a period of high stress before his wedding, Adam is now well and has no colitis symptoms whatsoever. “I’m the strongest and healthiest I’ve been—probably ever,” he says.

He’s happy to announce that he’s expecting his first child with his wife, Susie, who has literally stood by him in sickness and in health, and is relieved that he no longer has to rely on toxic medication—with all its associated risks—to be able to function like a normal person.

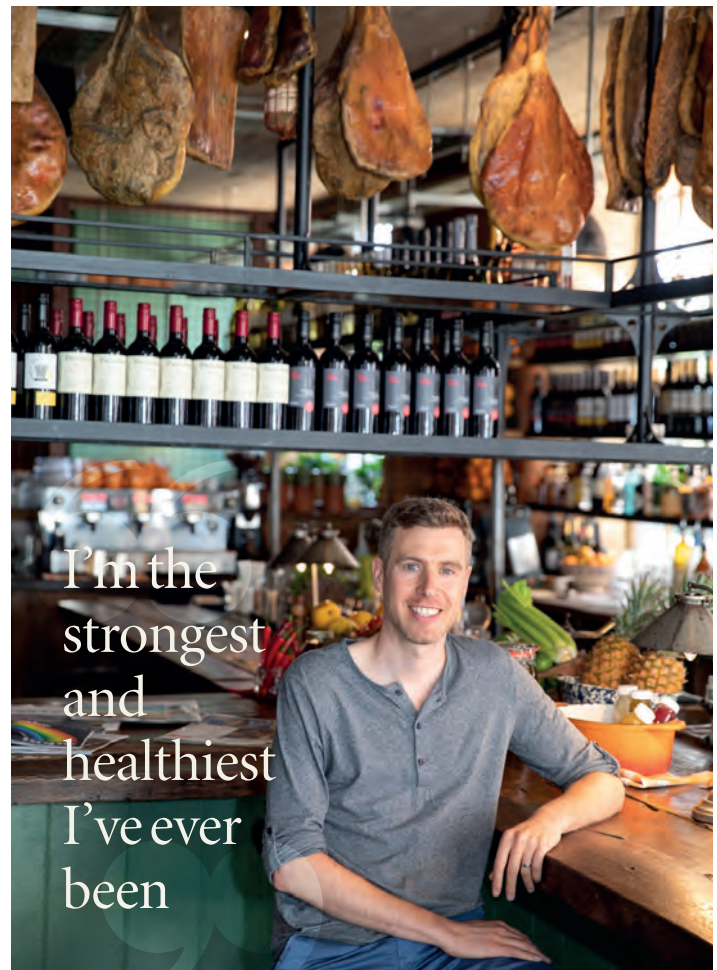
Adam points out that he is not ‘cured’—his condition will “always be there”—but he now feels in control of it, equipped with the right tools, which currently also include stress-reduction methods like qigong, to keep his symptoms at bay.

Now a qualified acupuncturist with his own clinic in King’s Cross, Adam even claims to be able to stop a colitis flare in its tracks by using acupuncture on himself.

Crucially, Adam is now able to work full time—as a special educational needs teacher four days a week and as a “naturopathic acupuncturist” one day a week—something he never thought possible a few years ago. “I really enjoy doing both, and I’m so happy that I can,” he says.

While every day involves a conscious effort to preserve the health he’s regained, Adam does not feel that his diet and lifestyle are limiting. “Quite the opposite,” he says. “These choices have dragged me out of a solitary life and back into the world.”

Joanna Evans



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Adam’s typical daily diet

Here’s a snapshot of Adam’s diet when he was first diagnosed, and after he switched to a Paleo diet.

BEFORE		AFTER
BREAK-FAST	Cereal with semi-skimmed milk, toast and peanut butter	Homemade almond and banana porridge with cinnamon and ginger topped with a stewed apple/pear (winter); coconut yoghurt with homemade nut granola and chopped fruit (summer)
LUNCH	Sandwich, crisps	Poached eggs with steamed spinach and kale (winter); warm chicken salad (summer)
DINNER	Ready meal or a takeaway	Homemade beef stew with root veg (winter); poached salmon with spinach, broccoli and onion (summer)
SNACKS/TREATS	Chocolate bars, crisps, salted nuts	Soaked and dehydrated nuts (almonds, cashews, walnuts); homemade date and nut snack bars
DRINKS	Cola, lemonade, alcohol (beer)	Water, green tea, oolong tea, roasted chicory

Useful contacts and resources

- www.thepaleodiet.com (Loren Cordain’s site)
- www.colitisandcrohnscenter.com (David Klein’s site)
- www.kingscrossacupuncture.co.uk (Adam Lucas’ acupuncture practice)
- www.naturopathy-uk.com (College of Naturopathic Medicine)
- www.fincadevida.com (Finca de Vida, Costa Rica)

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- Gastroenterol Hepatol (NY), 2008;4: 355–61