

Fiona in Focus

Leon Minton



If you happen to be at a local race you might be surprised to see Leon Minton accepting an award in the 70-74 year age group. He looks much younger and his 5K time is typically in the 26-27-minute range. His youthful appearance and athleticism are not simply thanks to good genes but the result of a determined effort on his part.

Several years ago Minton was 30 pounds heavier and not very active. At his yearly physical he was informed that because his cholesterol was over 200, it was recommended he start taking the statin drug Lipitor. After a few months Minton started researching ways he could lower his cholesterol more naturally and realized that to reach his goal he needed to

tackle two key elements -- diet and exercise.



He learned a lot about diet modifications through reading the China Study and the Starch Solution, watching the film *Forks over Knives*, and studying many other books, articles, and videos. Minton gradually adopted what he calls a 'whole food plant based' (WFPB) diet that favors fresh produce and eliminates processed foods, making it even healthier than the traditional vegan diet. While eliminating so many foods was initially difficult, he explained that the rewards greatly outweigh the challenges. He now appreciates the taste and benefits of food that is natural and not loaded with sugars and artificial flavorings, and he loves the way healthy eating makes him feel. Minton acknowledges the role that food manufacturers play in contributing to society's obesity problem. "At first I missed the sweets like ice cream mostly and sometimes the meats and fish, but the taste buds did not take long to adapt and I don't miss them anymore because I have such a huge variety in plant foods and spices to enjoy. Although I used to love the trifecta of sugar, fat, and salt in processed foods, I now consider the health consequences when offered those foods and resist the temptation. They are purposefully made addictive to increase profits with no consideration for the destruction to our health. Sugary sodas and breakfast cereals marketed to kids is a prime example, reminding me the the Joe Camel days and candy cigarettes."

The efficacy of his diet is plain to see. six months after starting the WFPB diet his drug dosage was reduced in half and six months later, he was off it entirely and has remained prescription drug free ever since. His cholesterol level has dropped from 200 to around 140.

Minton described a typical daily meal plan.

"For breakfast, I make a large bowl of cereal using old fashioned rolled oats with chia seeds, ground flaxseeds, walnuts, prunes, blueberries or raisins, apple chunks, sliced banana, and plant milk, usually soy but sometimes almond, hazelnut, or coconut. Lunch and dinner are simply beans, potatoes, brown rice, and various whole fresh or frozen veggies in some haphazard combination. I use spices and/or Bragg Liquid Aminos for flavoring but no salt."

Inspired by his example, Minton's wife also has improved her diet and now embraces a more active lifestyle. The change in Leon's appearance, however, has one person a little concerned. "My mother thinks I am too skinny

because she is used to seeing me at least 30 pounds heavier or more for most of my adult life." Two of his favorite restaurants that cater to his particular dietary preferences are Spiral Diner in Fort Worth and Sweet Tomatoes.

In 1985, encouraged by avid runner and co-worker, Sam Balandran, Minton decided to give running a try. He started with a few short races and worked up to running a sub 4 hour marathon in 1987 at age 41. He now logs on average 20 miles a week and races almost every weekend. Like most regular racers he enjoys the camaraderie and the personal challenge of pushing himself to achieve an age group award or a new PR.

When he is not running or racing, Minton likes to swim, read and take on various projects around the home. An avid music lover, he enjoys listening to classical music, classic rock and new age acoustical music. He also helps out with Parker Paws animal rescue group and supports his wife in her animal rescue activities.

As for his future health goals he plans to "Keep running, eating well, and remaining in the 150s for my weight."

That's all for our weekly dose of inspiration!