In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the nationwide shutdown began in March of 2020 and significantly affected how many people ate. With restaurants closed, many had to start cooking at home. However, this was not an issue for me, as I was already accustomed to preparing my food at home. By the time COVID-19 had become widespread, I had already undergone a major life-changing event that would significantly impact my eating habit and food choices. On February 27, 2020, I underwent a renal transplant operation. This meant that not only would I have a long and slow recovery process ahead of me, but my diet was about to change drastically.

A bit of information about the purpose of the kidneys in one’s body, the health of a renal transplant, and how this relates to one’s dietary needs. The kidneys act as a filter in the human body. They clean the body from harmful toxins that, if left unchecked, cause everything from heart failure to seizures, strokes, neurotoxicity, diabetes, and more.

After a kidney transplant operation, a person must consume a significant amount of protein in the weeks following the procedure to speed the healing process. After this period, protein must be carefully monitored and significantly reduced! This is because animal protein becomes creatinine in the body which is hard for a transplanted kidney to process and can impair its function, cause it damage, and reduce its life expectancy. Other foods can be harmful to a transplant, too, including processed foods, foods high in sodium, and refined sugar.

For me, this all meant that I had to initially consume a large amount of animal protein which, while hard on a transplant, was necessary to accelerate the healing process at the site of my incision. After roughly five weeks, once the surgical site had healed enough to become stable, I had to all but eliminate animal protein, processed food, high sodium foods, and refined sugar. I began eating many vegetables and a controlled amount of fruit. I also replaced meats and fish with dairy and vegetable-based protein sources. While I have long been a consistently careful and healthy eater, I had to adjust to a minimal selection of food items to choose from and a very bland pallet.

A yogurt and pudding parfait was one concoction that I devised as a reliable “go-to” meal that met my new dietary restrictions. The ingredients are simple, and it is easy to make. Here is the recipe and instructions for creating this parfait:

One serving of whole-grain oatmeal

½ cup of nonfat plain Greek yogurt

One serving of sugar-free vanilla pudding (roughly a ½ cup)

¼ cup of fresh blueberries or raspberries

Make the sugar-free pudding and chill it in a refrigerator to set up. Next, place the cooked oatmeal in a small bowl or a large cup––I use a cappuccino cup myself ––and put it in your refrigerator to chill. Once the pudding has set up, and the oatmeal has cooled, add the plain Greek yogurt atop to the oatmeal base, and the pudding atop the yogurt. Finally, top the pudding with the berries. That’s all there is to it! The dish is not terribly sweet and may seem bland to a pallet conditioned to a typical American diet. However, after a few weeks, your pallet adjusts to the overall blander diet, and you begin to notice that this dish is surprisingly delightful and flavorful.