

# Happy Anniversary, A to Zinc Nutrition!

Celebrating 5 Years of Helping Chronic Pain Sufferers Reach Optimal Health

*Kari Collett, RDN, LDN, CLT with A to Zinc Nutrition, LLC*

March is a particularly special month this year! It is National Nutrition Month, but more importantly, it is A to Zinc Nutrition's 5-year Anniversary.

The years have gone by quickly! I remember my excitement when I drove home from my "real" job for the last time on March 1, 2018. I could finally practice nutrition outside the confines of conventional medicine. I had no idea that the hobby I started two years earlier would become a full-scale operation helping people resolve the root cause of their pain and suffering.

I reflect on how primitive my practice was in 2016. At that time, we were only offering the MRT and the standard three LEAP support sessions. We were tracking everything on paper with handwritten notes. Our finances were tracked on a one-page Excel spreadsheet. We didn't have an office; consequently, many of our patient appointments were done over phone (way before "virtual sessions" were a thing) or sometimes in a public meeting room such as a coffee shop or the local library; coordinating those was stressful and distracting. We had a very simple, one-page do-it-yourself website. Doubtful that anyone ever visited the site!

Our growth continued in 2017 based almost exclusively on patient referrals. People were excited about their results and told others! Most patients were getting 25-75% improvement in the first 10 days with just food, and up to 80% improvement by the end of six weeks. Looking to hit higher target resolutions, we started offering an intracellular micronutrient test to patients who wanted to add information and value to their health optimization plan. Those that chose to do the micronutrient testing and use recommended supplements to address deficiencies obtained an additional 5-10% resolution in symptoms by the end of their program.

We also introduced two key relationships into the A to Zinc professional network: Julia Krengel at The Perfect Fit and Dr. Ron Hanson at OrthoCure Clinic. Both shared my philosophy on foods, nutrients, eating, and root cause analysis and solutions to health challenges. They also both recognized the benefits for their clients when we all worked together as a team. Patient outcomes improved significantly! Soon each provided me with office space for rent at their respective locations. So, we went from having no office space to having two offices! You may remember when we were in Sartell, MN and Richfield, MN.

Despite our growth in 2017, something significant happened that caused me to question whether doing only the MRT/LEAP was enough: one patient didn't get the optimal results we had expected (he had opted to not do micronutrient testing). He was a 30-year-old man with anxiety and depression as primary symptoms. He followed the LEAP plan exactly and found some improvement, just not enough. I did extensive research into foods and nutrients that support mental health and discovered the bottom line: people with mental health concerns needed targeted nutrients at higher than normal doses. This patient just wasn't going to get better without additional testing to help me understand what he needed. Making educated guesses for his supplement recommendations wasn't getting great results.

This was the turning point in which the micronutrient analysis became a required part of our basic program starting in 2018. As a result, our comprehensive, unlimited support packages were born.

Even before our official full-time launch date in 2018, we had everything in place so we could hit the ground running once March 1 rolled around. We hired a business coach to guide us through all things business. My passion was nutrition, not finances or business management. We hired our first part-time administrative assistant to help with the workload. We upgraded to a real accounting system. We transitioned from a paper-and-file system to an official HIPAA compliant patient portal. We were delighted to have everything automated! We also invested in true Google real estate with a much more robust website. Now people had a place to go to learn more about A to Zinc Nutrition and the people we help!

That same year, we also expanded into providing limited supplements for sale. With good nutrient status testing and understanding, we were consistently giving patients supplement recommendations. Invariably, they would go shopping on their own without much confidence. I was asked many times to read labels for dosing requirements, types of vitamins or minerals, added ingredients lists, and so on. Our patients practically begged us to make supplements available that met our criteria and their requirements without all the hassle. Collett Collections, LLC, A to Zinc's sister company, was born to meet those needs. The exact landscape of providing supplements has changed over the years, but only for the better with the integration of supplement dispensaries with our health record portal.

While we were building the business aspect of A to Zinc and expanding tests and supplements, I still felt the need to know more information to help my patients get even better results. I understood that more personalized plans could be significant for patients. What better way to personalize than to test genomics? Nutrigenomics, the branch of genomic study specifically tied to foods and nutrients, was a fascinating field! While this has never been a required part of our programs, those that have done the testing have benefited tremendously. Since 2019, genomic data has helped to personalize patient plans targeted at nutrients and lifestyle practices as well as recommend additional testing and other interventions for prevention of future health challenges based on genomic risk.

Our next adventure in 2019 was to learn more about cardiometabolic disease as it is the number one cause of death in the US. We spent the better part of the year looking into the best tests, markers of inflammation specific to cardiometabolic disease, and nutrient, herbal, and lifestyle interventions. Again, not required, but since 2020, A to Zinc Nutrition has offered a functional cardiometabolic test that provides information people can't get from their regular doctors and lab work. Our testing provides information about the functions of various types of cholesterol. It's a great resource for those concerned about heart health that can help shape a long-term prevention plan.

That year was also the year I started a higher-level functional nutrition certification course – in my “spare time”. I began to see some of the limitations of what I was able to give my patients. I had the right idea, just not necessarily the best tests. As I went through the coursework and gained more knowledge and confidence, we gradually switched to better and more comprehensive tests. The micronutrient test we use now is the Genova NutrEval, the cardiometabolic test is from Cleveland Heart Labs, and the genomic testing is from 3x4 Genomics. All are upgrades from the first tests we were using as they all have more in-depth data and information, and better research to back their reporting.

2020 was a challenging year for everyone, A to Zinc included. We closed shop in Sartell the same day the state shut down due to COVID. Thankfully, Julia purchased a new building in St. Joseph. After extensive remodeling, we were able to move into the building and start seeing patients on a limited basis in June. At the same time this office was relocating, so was the office in Richfield. Dr. Hanson found a new clinic space in Mahtomedi. Our team was reduced to just one part-time team member and most of my work was done remotely from my mother's home where I stayed to help after she was diagnosed with cancer.

We embraced 2021 with new hopes and expectations! The class I was taking taught me how to interpret conventional labs from an optimal point-of-view rather than normal. This provided the opportunity to fine-tune patient recommendations even further without added expense to them. Most labs are covered by patient insurances and review of the labs is included in our unlimited support packages. Again, we improved patient outcomes.

Since the inception of our package approach to serving our patients, we recognized there was still a couple of gaps: the before and the after. That year provided us with some extra time to begin addressing the gaps. The before program, LEAP Jumpstart™, was created! We are really excited about this program because it gives our patients an opportunity to start making changes immediately. Getting lab results can take a couple of weeks and people in pain don't want to wait that long to start improving their health. Furthermore, Jumpstart helps patients prepare for the bigger changes that are coming by coaching them through small changes first. This sets people up for greater success as they enter their program.

We approached 2022 with much the same enthusiasm and continued the practice of slowly but surely improving our tests, services, and outcomes. The more we learned, the more we wanted to offer our patients. This was the year we took a deep dive into microbiome testing. We investigated the differences between older (but good) and newer (but less research) technologies and found one we love and trust! With BiomeFX stool analysis by Microbiome Labs, we can take a functional look at bacteria, viruses, fungi, and more inside a patient's gut to help us understand more about their health. We now offer a GUT Health Optimizer program that integrates this testing.

Also in 2022, we were ready to start addressing the other gap: the after. Over the years, many patients have asked us to create menus for them. Planning what to eat was the most difficult part of sticking to a program long-term, yet it was the most critical piece for sustaining their optimal health results. While I really enjoy planning menus, I also didn't have the time to provide that service in a format that was affordable for patients – until we implemented LEAP Link™! We are now able to provide patients with personalized menus, shopping lists, batch cooking, and so much more with an affordable automated software.

Here we are, March 2023. We have helped hundreds of patients over the years. Most of our new patients still come from past patient referrals. We are so grateful to everyone that has shared their good news. We recognize we have had a few outliers over the years – those that don't get the standard 50-90% improvement in symptoms over the course of their four-month program. Without a doubt, we wish we could improve everyone 100% but the human body is complex and that is an impossible goal. However, we are so grateful to have those patients. They are the ones that push us to learn more, expand our testing, seek expert input, and so much more. If you happen to be reading this and were one of those patients, we invite you to come back and discover how much more we can do for you now that we couldn't do years ago.

We are filled with anticipation and excitement for all that we can accomplish in the next five years and beyond! Our vision is to reach hundreds, if not thousands, of people with pain and chronic disease and to continue to strive to be the area's leading nutrition expert and go-to source for all questions health and nutrition focused.

A to Zinc Nutrition restores health naturally with food and nutrients unique to you!

To learn more about optimizing your health and working with an expert nutrition provider, schedule a free Discovery Call: <https://atozincnutrition.com/schedule/>