

An All-American's Diet

During her first year at U-M in 2007-08, distance runner Kaitlyn Peale began to experience ... well, she wasn't quite sure what was happening. Though her appetite was fine and she was getting enough sleep, some days she'd have great workouts, then other days she'd feel exhausted.

"I'd have periods where I'd just sort of crash," Peale said. "It didn't make any sense. It was frustrating."

Trips to doctors and dietitians provided no answers. Peale visited a handful of medical professionals, including her doctor at home in Columbus, Ohio, on three different occasions. Her blood work came back normal. She then went on a gluten-free diet to see if that might solve her issues. It didn't.

All of this deeply bothered Peale, who expected to blossom as a collegiate runner. Although she had recorded relatively modest times as a prep athlete at Upper Arlington High School, she understood her school's tradition of grooming runners to excel once they reached college.

"I wasn't running as many miles or running all year-round like other high school girls I saw," Peale said. "I knew I had a lot of potential."

It was potential that remained unfulfilled through Peale's second year on the Michigan campus.

"She would have good days and bad days," Michigan women's cross country and associate head track coach Mike McGuire said. "But never was there a lack of effort."

By the summer of 2009, her energy levels dipped so low that sometimes she felt drained after walking the two flights of steps to her temporary job as a data analyst. She paid another visit to her doctor, who this time suggested she might suffer from food intolerance: an inability to properly digest or fully process certain foods. The doctor suggested she see a dietitian named Michal Hogan. Coincidentally, Peale's mother Melissa had recently been talking to a friend who mentioned Hogan, too.

Peale and Hogan met and decided that Peale's blood would be tested against a number of foods for a reaction. The results showed that Peale needed to make major dietary changes.

She began a basic regimen of fewer than 15 different foods. Sweet potatoes were in, as were zucchini and several different grains. That was it for about a week. Then Peale added one food back each day and gauged her reaction to make sure it was safe.

"I felt awful the first two weeks," Peale recalled. "I couldn't run at all."

That quickly changed. Even though Peale was still adjusting to her new diet when the women's cross country team began its pre-season training camp in northern Michigan, she saw positive results.

"Going into camp, I was really unsure of how I would do there," she said. "It turned out my body started to recover and feel better. I had a really good camp."

The improvements in performance continued for Peale, who had entered the 2009 season hoping just to make the Wolverines' travel team. Instead, she finished fourth at the Big Ten Championships and, thanks to a second-place NCAA regional finish, qualified for the NCAA Championships.

"Once I did that, I thought that maybe being an All-American was a legitimate goal," she said.

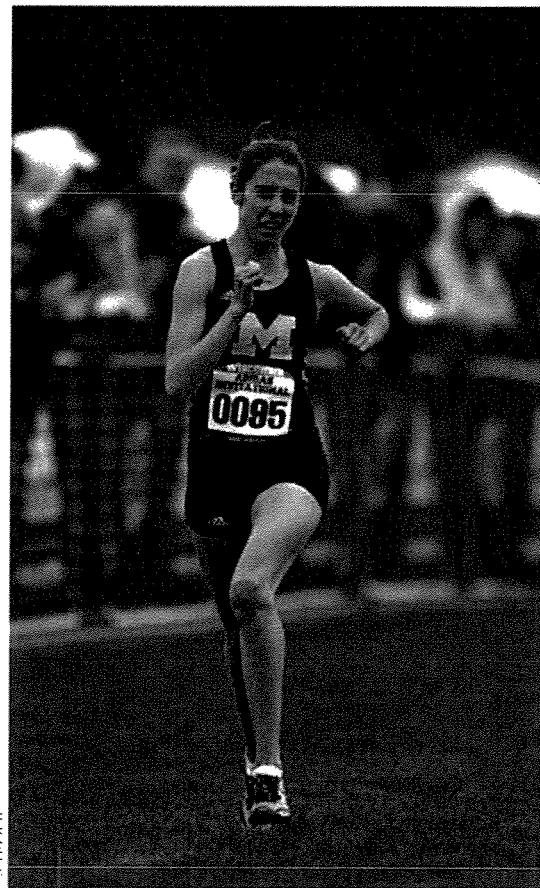
At the championships in Terre Haute, Indiana, Peale did earn All-American honors, finishing 32nd to complete a season that she calls "shocking, but in a really good way."

For more than a year now, Peale has learned what her body can handle. She has continued a diet based heavily on grains such as kamut, as well as the grain-like quinoa. She still eats lots of sweet potatoes and can have meat such as steak, turkey and chicken, without sauces or marinades. Ice cream is out. Peale doesn't eat peanut butter and jelly, cantaloupe or watermelon, either.

An Academic All-Big Ten performer majoring in industrial and operational engineering, Peale said she's comfortable with her new dietary habits, although she still doesn't know how her food intolerance developed. She added that she's thankful for the support McGuire and her teammates gave her during her challenging times and is also more confident than ever in her abilities.

"I was a little timid at the beginning of last year," Peale said. "I didn't know what my potential really was. If I get faster and become stronger, that can only lead to better things."

—John Heuser, MA'94



U-M Athletics

• **Peale is hitting her stride, thanks to finally discovering that she is food intolerant. She went from modestly successful to All-American last season and is ready to test herself this season.**