



I Fully Recovered From a Heart Attack in 3 Months of Eating Plants

By Byron Edgington
April 29 2020

Two years ago, in January 2018, I had a heart attack. I wasn't a candidate for one: I had no particular family history of cardiac disease. My cholesterol levels had always been enviably low. I slept well, albeit with a bit of snoring that kept my spouse awake at times. I had very little stress in my life, enjoyed my days with the woman I adore, and hadn't had a cigarette in 40 years. In fact, as a commercial pilot, I'd been required to successfully pass a stringent medical exam every year, a physical that had never posed a problem.

Nonetheless, two years ago at age 69, I found myself in an emergency room with frightening chest pain, shortness of breath, nausea, and the standard presentation for a myocardial infarction. I'd had a heart attack.

From the emergency room I went to a cath lab, where fluoroscopy showed that my left descending cardiac artery, my LAD, was 95 percent blocked. The specialist placed a stent in that vessel, I felt immediately better, and after four days in the hospital I went home relieved, grateful, and determined to never have another experience like that.

Adjusting to Life After Heart Attack

My life changed utterly. I went from a carefree existence to a life of checking [blood pressure](#); cardiac rehab; a drug regimen consisting of an ACE inhibitor, a beta blocker, Plavix, a statin, and baby aspirin; and a lingering fear with every flutter in my chest. I also had to attend regular checkups with my heart doctor. The toughest change was knowing that I now had a history of [cardiac disease](#). As I approached my 70th birthday it was yet another unwelcome sign of advancing age.

My wife and I did quite a bit of research into causes, and cures, and the general state of my health and daily practices. However, it never occurred to us that our nutrition had to change. We were both dedicated to the standard American diet. We'd given up red meat some time before, but the rest of our diet hadn't changed all that much. We still ate fish, poultry, dairy, eggs, and oil. It was not uncommon for us to start off each dinner with a plate of [oil](#) for dipping bread.

Then a friend who is a vegan came for lunch one afternoon. We prepared a meal in keeping with his needs, black bean and mango veggie burgers. The burgers were just astonishingly good. Over lunch, our friend Bill explained a few of the nutritional, health, and ecological reasons why he'd changed to a plant-based diet. He told us about [The China Study](#) and [Prevent and Reverse Heart Disease](#), two books he said had changed his life. So, as the saying goes, when the student is ready, the teacher appears.

Getting a Taste of Better Health

My wife and I decided to try the whole-food, plant-based way of eating, and the results, like those yummy black bean burgers, have been astonishing. Within three months, I lost 25 pounds. My blood pressure, which had been unstable following my heart attack, stabilized. I had no more of the dizziness and nausea associated with my cardiac event. In addition, we were enjoying savory meals we never knew existed.

There were obstacles to eating only plants, of course. We knew right away that we'd spend lots more time in the kitchen, that friends would have to yield somewhat to our newfound food and restaurant choices, and that grocery shopping would require much more discernment and diligence. We live in Medellin, Colombia, and certain prep items are difficult or impossible to find here. However, Colombia offers a bonus that makes up for that: We have ready access to all manner of delicious and extremely fresh vegetables and fruits.

What surprised us most about eating plant-based is that instead of denying ourselves, we've discovered dozens of delicious new meals; our tastes have changed and become more astute; and we've learned to use substitutes for various traditional ingredients. Applesauce in place of oil—who knew?

But the biggest surprise of all came on my latest visit with my heart doctor. At the appointment, I told my doctor about our new meal plan, and about the health benefits that robust, peer-reviewed research demonstrates. I told him about [The China Study](#) and [Prevent and Reverse Heart Disease](#), two books

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that have now changed my life.

After he'd done his routine exam, I asked about all the drugs. I wanted to know if there were any changes he recommended, anything he'd consider removing from my regimen.

He looked at my amazing weight loss, my perfectly normal lab values, and my entirely normal checkup, and said he saw no reason for me to continue taking the cardiac meds. I could discontinue all but one: baby aspirin, to make sure the stent remains open. So after just three months eating plant-based meals, I'd not only fully recovered from a heart attack; it was almost as if it never happened.

Living It Up

Today I feel better than ever. I walk and use a treadmill with no exertion at all, I sleep better, and I've stopped snoring, much to the relief of my dear spouse. The before and after pictures tell the tale. On the beach in Hawaii, I weighed 182 pounds; today I weigh 146.

Because of our plant-based menu, my wife and I have regained our lives as retirees. We spend lots more time in the kitchen now, and that's just fine. Our favorite meals are a fabulous plants-only shepherd's pie, a portobello mushroom and pasta mix, and the [Crispy Buffalo Cauliflower Bites](#) and ["No-Tuna" Salad Sandwich](#) from Forks Over Knives.

Some friends have chafed at our new lifestyle, and a few really don't understand it. We try to stay off the soapbox about plant-based eating, but it's difficult to avoid spreading the word. While we truly are doing it for our health, we can't overlook the benefits to the [environment](#), either. Plants are sustainable food sources that provide more and better nutrition than animals do. So we're eating green these days. And the results, for us, have been life-altering.

Ready to get started? Check out our [Plant-Based Primer](#) to learn more about adopting a whole-food, plant-based diet.