



# Hypertension, Ear Infections, Excess Weight—All Gone on a Plant-Based Diet

By Jackie Lopez  
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I always struggled with my weight growing up. I was never the heaviest in my class, but I was always heavy enough to know I was different, and to hate it. A typical day of eating consisted of cheesy grits or buttery, sugary oatmeal for breakfast; school cafeteria food for lunch; and chips, candy, cheese sandwiches, and chocolate milk after school until dinnertime, when I would gorge myself on whatever my mother had cooked—usually a piece of baked or pan-fried meat and a side of rice and vegetables with butter.

## Years of Yo-Yo Dieting

I started my first [low-carb diet](#) and exercise regimen at 14, and I lost 23 pounds. For the next six years, all the way through high school and early college, I went through the same cycle over and over: I'd gain weight (usually 10 to 20 pounds). Then I'd lose weight and get fit on a low-carb diet with strenuous exercise. Eventually I'd succumb to cravings and put the weight back on.

No matter how much I lost, I was never happy with how I looked. I was the girl always fidgeting with my clothes or holding the couch pillow on my lap to hide my stomach. Still, yo-yo dieting seemed to be the thing that worked best for me, until it didn't. A lifetime of unhealthy binge-eating patterns primed me for the most rapid downward spiral I could have imagined when a series of emotional events triggered the onset of alcoholism and full-blown food addiction. I was 20 years old. On my worst nights (of which there were many), I ate fast food for dinner, drank enough alcohol to put a sailor to shame, then ate fast food again late at night. I was too sick, hungover, and depressed to think of exercising or eating well.

By the time I was 25, I had gone from weighing in the 120s (my lowest weight) to weighing 213 pounds. I had blood pressure spikes as high as 150/104, high cholesterol, heart palpitations, chronic ear infections that led to hearing loss—the list goes on and on.

I met my husband in 2012 (when I was 21), married him in 2013, and started trying to rekindle my childhood relationship with God a few years later in the midst of the tumult. I began addressing my alcohol addiction in 2017, and I started crying out to God and asking Him to show me how to restore my health. With an extensive family history of heart disease, cancer, and diabetes, I was terrified by the state I was in. I feared that I might not live to be 30. And, to top it all off, my husband and I had tried to conceive a child for three years with no success. I had become a person I didn't even recognize. I was already depressed before the weight gain, but I had become nearly hopeless.

## Coming Around to a Plant-Based Diet

After I began praying about my health, bread crumbs of information started showing up in my life, all leading me toward a plant-based diet. I only knew one vegan at the time, and my husband and I tended to poke fun at him, asking questions like, “Where do you get your protein?” (I laugh now at how ignorant we were.) But as time went on and I kept coming across information about plant-based nutrition, I could no longer deny my interest in this way of eating. I saw the *Forks Over Knives* documentary and confronted the facts: The [whole-food, plant-based diet](#) is the healthiest diet for mankind. Period.

Still, I admit that it took me a while to come around. I hired a trainer in early 2018 and painstakingly lost about 20 pounds by (you guessed it!) low-carb dieting and exercising. After my time with the trainer was done, I yo-yoed back and forth within that 20 pounds for a few months, had a few more health scares, and finally became sick and tired of all the pain I was in. On Aug. 10, 2018, I switched to a whole-food, plant-based diet.

## Results Within 2 Months

(continued)

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It blew me away how fast I saw results on a whole-food, plant-based diet. My LDL cholesterol dropped 62 points in the first two months. I lost 62 pounds by January 2019 without exercising, landing me at 131 pounds. The congestion in my ears went away, and my hearing loss reversed. I no longer have heart palpitations. My average blood pressure now is 105/70. I'm amazed that after all the years I spent working my butt off at the gym and wrestling with myself at meal times, the solution was so simple. God answered my prayers by showing me a healthy lifestyle that I could enjoy.

The food is so delicious that, after a few months, my husband jumped on board, too. We enjoy finding new recipes to try, but the best thing is when we're able to successfully revise old favorites to make them plant-based. We've found so many new favorites this way, from WFPB pizza to brownies to cashew-cheese sauces and beyond. And the icing on the oil-free vegan cake is the beautiful baby we welcomed into the world on July 1, 2020, after more than four years of infertility! I love eating foods that nourish my mind and body, and I can't wait to teach my daughter how to enjoy eating plants, too.

*Ready to get started? Check out [Forks Meal Planner](#), FOK's easy weekly meal-planning tool to keep you on a healthy plant-based path. To learn more about a whole-food, plant-based diet, visit our [Plant-Based Primer](#).*