



Eric Adams on His New Book, 'Healthy at Last,' and the True Meaning of Soul Food

By Courtney Davison
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Ever since [Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams](#) reversed his diabetes in three months on a whole-food, plant-based diet, he's been on a mission to make healthful eating more accessible in his community, bringing [Meatless Mondays to Brooklyn public schools](#) and [plant-based nutrition to New York City hospitals](#). Now he's delivering his message to an even larger audience with a new book. In *Healthy at Last*, Adams shares his story, unpacks the inequalities in our food system, and presents a roadmap for transitioning to a plant-based diet, with plenty of recipes. We chatted with Adams about his new book and why plant-based eating is for everyone.

Forks Over Knives: How did the idea come about for *Healthy at Last*?

Eric Adams: In the years speaking about my personal journey, I've had people reach out to me saying, "I heard you on a podcast," or "I heard you in a church and my life turned around because of that," or "Immediately after hearing you I went home and talked to my husband, my wife, my family members." I wanted to let people know that there's nothing special about me: Everyone can empower themselves. You can take these little steps. And I thought, "Let me put this in a book form so that people can see for themselves."

FOK: How did you go about deciding who would contribute recipes?

EA: It was important to me to dispel the rumor that plant-based, healthy food was a white thing. For a long time, many people would say things like, "Oh, what, you're trying to be white? You're trying to move away? You're too good to eat our food?" By showing plant-based healthy cooks who are people of color, we can open a new dialogue to say that this is not a white thing; this is a right thing. We wanted people to see themselves in the meals... and to present a healthy new version of the soul food style, to show that you can have good-tasting, healthy food that you won't feel guilty after eating.

FOK: In the book you talk about how mac and cheese and chitlins aren't truly soul food—that plants were “the original soul food.” What do you mean by that?

EA: When you look into the food we were eating when we were in the continent of Africa, we came from cultures that ate from the ground, that ate healthy food. That's the real soul food. That's the food that we should be eating, that's good for your soul and your body. Yet we've attached the black experience to the food that colonizers forced on the ancestors during slavery. ... We culturized the food that was poison for us. And it's leading to the devastation and the health care crisis that we're facing.

FOK: What do you see as the main obstacles to accessing healthy foods?

EA: Corporate entities are extremely conscious in the ways that they target groups. ... And overcoming that is going to require a great deal of conversation. ... Madison Avenue believes that [majority-Black neighborhoods] will only eat fast and junk food. And that's one of the barriers: Those who are providing food and access to food don't believe in the people that they're giving food to. Our goal is to have more people open eateries that are concerned about the health of the people, [not just] how profitable it is to have these establishments.

FOK: How did the COVID-19 crisis come into play with the book?

EA: It became a teaching moment. Asthma, respiratory issues, diabetes, and heart disease ... these are the conditions that contributed to over 90 percent of [COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths]. *Healthy at Last* shows how to empower yourself during the pandemic. You don't have to feel helpless. ... You can do something to lessen your chance of getting a chronic disease; to fight off chronic diseases; to strengthen your immune system; to prevent the need for hospitalization; even to reduce the risk of losing your life. So this was an excellent opportunity. I probably spoke more during this period of time of coronavirus than I did in any three-month period over the last few years around the conversation of health.

FOK: What else would you like people to know about going whole-food, plant-based?

EA: It's a life journey. Don't beat yourself up. In life, there are good days and bad days. There are days that we

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wish we would have done something, and there are days that we are sorry we did something. But it's the accumulation of all of those moments that creates the experience of what we call life. Settle into it at a pace that's comfortable to you, and just nurture, love yourself—not only physically, but spiritually. We talk about meditation in the book, we talk about taking walks. We talk about “me” time, about food preparation, about taking time to just really settle into this new lifestyle. And that to me is so important, because eating should be fun. It should not be a job. It should not be labor-intensive. It should not feel as though, "Oh, I *have* to do this." You should feel as though, "This is my gift to my body, my family, and those who I love and who love me."

FOK: What does “healthy at last” mean to you?

EA: So many people believe, as I did, that aging meant chronic disease: As you got older, you would get some form of chronic disease, that you should just fall into a new norm of injecting insulins, of taking drugs, of your body adjusting to the aches, the pains, the prescriptions, the side effects. There's a song that is well known in the African-American community that says, "At last." It's like finding your love at last. And so this book was just my way of encouraging people to find the love of themselves. . . . It's about being healthy at last, instead of accepting a lifetime of being unhealthy.

Healthy at Last is [available for pre-order now](#) and out Oct. 13, 2020.