



A Plant-Based Diet Freed Me After Decades of Digestive Distress

By Brianna Eckler
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I've been plagued by gastrointestinal issues since infancy. As a child I went through extensive allergy testing and discovered I had a multitude of food allergies, including soy, tree nuts, peanuts, and shellfish. Avoiding my dietary allergens offered minimal gastrointestinal improvement. I figured I'd just need to live with the pain forever.

Bogged Down by Chronic Health Problems

Throughout my 20s and most of my 30s, I followed a diet that I thought was healthy: plenty of meat and dairy, because I'd been told they were necessary for protein and calcium. I'd add one side of vegetables, or fruit, and a sprinkling of grains to my animal product-based main course and call it a day. Compared with most Americans I thought I was doing pretty well in the diet and nutrition department.

Over the years, I developed an extensive list of health issues in addition to my gastrointestinal troubles—chronic migraines, a pituitary tumor, [depression](#), anxiety, random aches and pains, and a connective tissue disease. In early 2020, at 38 years old, I underwent extensive abdominal and pelvic surgery to repair damage that connective tissue issues contributed to. The surgery was the final straw for me. I was so tired of feeling sick and tired, and I wanted to do whatever I could to make my surgical repairs successful and long lasting. That meant I needed my gastrointestinal tract to cooperate for once.

Testing the Plant-Based Waters

I decided to try a plant-based diet to see if it would improve my gastrointestinal issues and aid in relieving my constant stomach pain, dysmotility, and colonic inertia. I'd always avoided plant-based diets in the past because of my soy allergy. I'd assumed that soy was the main protein source in a plant-based diet. But I was desperate and willing to try anything at this point.

To my delight, after doing more research I discovered that there were many different ways to get [protein](#) as a plant-based eater. One of my other concerns was getting enough [vitamin B12](#). This one was an easy fix with a supplement.

With this newfound knowledge I was ready to dive fully into a whole-food, plant-based diet. I knew that the structural issues I have would not be cured, but I hoped that I might at least improve my quality of life a bit while living with those conditions.

I was not disappointed. In a matter of just days my gastrointestinal issues started to improve. I experienced less gas and bloating, and the gnawing, painful feeling of being overly full was markedly less.

Feeling Better Than Ever

It's been almost a year since I transitioned to a fully plant-based diet. I have not looked or felt this good in a very long time! My [skin](#) looks radiant, my hair is fuller, and I have so much more energy. I have even lost 15 pounds. I'd never had success losing weight before despite restricting carbs and calories; now I feel satiated all day and not starving like I did before when trying to lose weight. The benefits to me personally have been invaluable. The added bonuses beyond myself of being kind to animals [and the planet](#) makes following a plant-based diet that much sweeter.

My next goal is to get my husband and three children [fully on board](#) with eating plant-based. Through cooking amazing, tasty, plant based meals for my family I hope that they will be more likely to choose plant-based options for life in the future.

I never would have thought that there was a simple answer to feeling better right in front of me all along. I hope my experience will inspire you to give plant based eating a try!

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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](#).