



From Obese Vegetarian to Fitter Than Ever on a Whole-Food, Plant-Based Diet

By Justin Weber
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I've struggled with weight for most of my life. I was the big kid who got teased on the playground and then the big adult who got called names behind his back and to his face. Food was my emotional escape, and I formed a toxic relationship with eating. I'd binge eat in secret and then sleep for most of the day. My days revolved around the times I could eat in private.

I went vegetarian in my teens (an unusual move in my small Wisconsin town), but when I stopped eating meat I ate a lot of heavily processed foods like chips, ice cream, takeout pizza, and soda. I rapidly gained weight.

Weaning Off Processed Foods

I reached my heaviest recorded weight at 375 pounds in my early 30s. Doctors told me that I wouldn't live to see my 40s because of the strain my weight was having on my body. I was told I needed to start treatment for [high blood pressure and cholesterol](#), and doctors warned me I was developing type 2 [diabetes](#). Then my son was born, and I realized that I needed to make a change in order to be the active dad I wanted to be and to be alive to watch him grow up.

My first step was to look at what I was eating, because I knew that my food choices were unhealthy. I focused on eating more whole foods and made simple swaps, such as using [whole wheat flour](#) instead of all purpose. The more in tune I was with what I was eating the more I noticed how much better I felt when eating or not eating certain foods.

Gradually, I stopped eating some processed foods and eventually most. It was a challenging transition, due to the addictive nature of processed foods; I had to retrain my brain and taste buds to enjoy natural sweetness and not drown all my meals in salt and [oil](#). I was able to curb the junk food cravings by cooking more at home and using single-ingredient items rather than relying on heavily processed foods. Seeing what was going into my meals and taking the time to cook helped me to value and honor my food more deeply, and, in time, I started to crave fresh fruits and vegetables and be fully satisfied with a [grain bowl](#) for dinner.

I learned about the whole-food, plant-based diet through the Forks Over Knives website and discovered a whole world of delicious foods that I had never experienced before.

Healthier than Ever

Over the past two years of eating a whole-food, plant-based diet, I've lost 200 pounds and easily maintained the weight loss. At my last checkup my physician told me that I am in textbook good health, and all of the prior medical concerns are no longer present. I've even stopped snoring!

My favorite meals now are ones that are loaded with vegetables. I know it sounds like I'm trying too hard, but I genuinely love a big bowl of vegetables for any meal of the day. I know that I'll feel satisfied and energized, instead of needing to take a nap. One of my favorite dinners is a grain bowl filled with a variety of raw and cooked vegetables and topped with a simple tahini lemon sauce. For snacks I typically stick to fresh or dried fruits. I'm far more satisfied with a nice, crisp [apple](#) than I am with a bowl of chips.

Over the past several years I've worked to spread the message that a whole-food, plant-based diet is not a sacrifice but life-giving, and I've helped others learn how to make a whole-food, plant-based lifestyle work for their lifestyle, culture, culinary experience, and personal tastes. Last year, I released a whole-food, plant-based cookbook and completed the Plant-Based Certificate program through the T. Colin Campbell Center for

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Nutrition Studies. My next goal is to figure out how to go to culinary school while working full-time and raising two kids. It's a dream to have the official title of chef added to my name—but mostly, I want to help others love food and better understand their choices.

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](#).