



I Put High Cholesterol and Severe Arthritis Behind Me on a Plant-Based Diet

By Bill McGrail
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I've always loved exercise, but after I began having meniscus tears in my knees that required surgery, I didn't exercise much, if at all. My orthopedic surgeon told me that both knees were full of [arthritis](#) and that there was nothing I could do about it. Then, in December 2017, at a long-overdue physical exam, I learned that my cholesterol was 265 and that I weighed 202 pounds. I told my wife, "I need to do something about this cholesterol." My wife—who had gone vegetarian seven years earlier to lower her cholesterol, without success—said, "No kidding!" She suggested we watch *Forks Over Knives* to learn more about how changing our diet might impact our health.

After watching *Forks* and some other documentaries and doing my own research on diet and health, I realized that the animal products and [highly processed foods](#) I had been eating were most likely causing my [high cholesterol](#), [excess weight](#), and circulation issues, as well as the [aches and pains](#) from arthritis in my knees. So, on Jan. 1, 2018, my wife and I went cold turkey, no pun intended, giving up all meat, cheese, and highly processed foods. We went 100 percent plant-based. I never like to ease into things.

Getting Cookin'?

In 35 years of marriage prior to that, I had never cooked a meal. Sure, I'd grilled some [steaks](#)—but I'd never prepared a meal in the kitchen, with fresh, natural ingredients and real spices. But I found some [vegan recipe](#) blogs online, and cooking became my new hobby.

Our new way of eating paid off almost immediately: In less than two months, my cholesterol dropped 104 points, and, as a nice side benefit, I lost 18 pounds. That was enough to make me feel fully committed to a plant-based lifestyle. We stuck with it, and in nine months, I lost 43 pounds, and my wife lost 30 pounds. Neither of us had been making any special effort to lose weight. It just came off naturally. At my annual physical exam in December 2018, my cholesterol was 161, within the healthy range.

Healthier in Every Way

Before we made the switch, I used to buy lunch every day and go out to dinner with my wife at least five nights a week. Now I batch-prepare weekly lunches, cook every night, and [plan out our meals](#). My wife likes to brag that she has her very own personal plant-based chef!

People often ask me "What do you eat? Lettuce?" I happily share some of my favorites: General Tso's cauliflower, spinach [pesto](#) pasta, [veggie stir-fries](#), vegetable korma over brown basmati rice, stuffed "ricotta" shells, [lentil bolognese](#)... I could go on and on. There are dozens of healthy, delicious recipes we enjoy regularly as part of a whole-food, plant-based way of eating.

In addition to lowering my weight and reducing my cholesterol, this diet has also alleviated my arthritis. My knees feel so great that I've actually started running, swimming, and even bicycling again—something I hadn't done in 18 years and didn't think I'd ever be able to do again. I run a 5K at least once a week, cycle 20 miles (or more) every other week, and work out on an elliptical trainer for an hour a couple days a week. I sleep better. Aches and pains don't last as long. Cuts heal faster. My [skin](#) is less oily. And my fingernails and toenails are a nice healthy pink!

My wife and I have been plant-based for more than three years now. My only regret is not starting this way of life 20 years ago.

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](#).