



Ankylosing Spondylitis Held Me Back for Years. Today I'm Pain-Free on a Plant-Based Diet

By Katie Floyd
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When I was just 13 years old, I developed pain in my elbow. The doctor diagnosed me with tennis elbow, though I hadn't been engaging in the sort of repetitive motion that would cause the condition. That subsided, but aches and pains began flaring up in different joints. I was diagnosed with bursitis many times throughout my adolescence and early adult years, in my knees, elbows, hip, and more. My symptoms usually settled down with medication, and I got used to the routine.

But in December 2000, my ankles and wrists swelled up, and the usual treatment didn't help.

That was when, at 34 years old, I finally received an accurate diagnosis: ankylosing spondylitis, a disease similar to (and treated like) [rheumatoid arthritis](#).

For three years, my doctors tried to find a medication that would enable me to walk without pain. Eventually, they settled on a regimen that helped somewhat. I wasn't able to do high-impact exercises, such as running, but I was usually able to do lower-impact exercises, such as walking, except during my worst flare-ups. I continued this way for about 10 years.

First Taste of Plant-Based Eating

In fall of 2017, I was looking to lose some weight. I'd always eaten what I believed to be a healthy diet (meat, dairy, and "plenty" of vegetables), and I tried to steer clear of [highly processed foods](#) (chips, crackers, etc.). Still, I'd packed on extra pounds over the years and had trouble shedding them. Then I spoke with a dear friend who had lost 100 pounds. She referred me to the Forks Over Knives website, where I learned how a whole-food, plant-based diet could be beneficial for [weight loss](#). I downloaded the [FOK recipe app](#) and started making whole-food, plant-based meals right away.

I didn't go all in on WFPB overnight. Learning to [cook without oil](#) and animal products took some time, and I had a [really hard time letting go of cheese](#). For the first few months, I ate WFPB during the week and had one non-WFPB meal every weekend. Gradually, I realized the positive impact that this new way of eating was having on my health, and I began to view it less as a weight-loss diet and more as a permanent lifestyle change. I phased out my "cheat days" and began eating WFPB 100 percent of the time.

The weight loss came easily. Within 10 months, I lost 40 pounds. Even more incredibly, about a year into eating this way, I realized that my ankylosing spondylitis symptoms had receded completely. My joints weren't bothering me at all.

A Life Unburdened By Ankylosing Spondylitis

As of this writing, I've been symptom-free from ankylosing spondylitis and any [arthritis](#) pain for 1 year and nine months, and I fully credit my recovery to my WFPB diet.

It is a time commitment to eat this way, but it's worth every minute. I do most of my food prep for the entire week on Sundays. My husband and I love [soup](#), so I make many varieties of that, from veggie chilis to mushroom chowders. I love to eat starchy vegetables, especially sweet potatoes, red potatoes, kabocha squash, and acorn squash, topped with all the wonderful [sauces](#) that I've learned to make. We eat a humongous [salad](#) every day for lunch, with homemade dressings I've discovered over the years. All our [dressings are WFPB](#), with no oil or added salt. We have several favorites and will never get tired of the salads. We also love [Indian dishes](#), [Mexican dishes](#), [vegetable sushi](#), and oil-free fried rice. I've printed all the recipes that are keepers and have them organized in a three-ring binder, which I share with friends and family when they're curious about my diet. I have no desire to eat anything that isn't plant-based anymore.

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Since my joints have been feeling so much better, I've been able to seriously take up exercising and have gotten really into Pilates, yoga, and running. I even ran my first marathon! What started as a weight-loss diet grew into a way of life, and I hope to live as healthy as possible for as long as possible.

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](#).