



My Journey from Junk-Food Vegan to Whole-Food, Plant-Based

By Nellie Vance
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I began dabbling in a raw vegan diet for my health in 2005, but I could never fully commit to it and always ended up going back to a standard American diet high in meat, cheese, and processed foods. In 2013, I decided to try going just vegan, and I was able to stick with it. Although it didn't help me to lose excess weight, it cleared up my eczema, reduced my chronic joint pain from [arthritis](#), and even alleviated my [depression](#) symptoms.

Any time someone expressed an interest in trying a vegan diet themselves, I encouraged them to do so. I recommended that they read *The Starch Solution* by John McDougall, MD, and watch documentaries such as *Forks Over Knives* to better understand the correlation between diet and chronic disease. The ironic thing was, I wasn't following the whole-food, plant-based diet that I was recommending to others. Instead, I was eating more of a junk-food [vegan diet](#): think fake meat, nondairy butter, Oreos, and Spicy Sweet Chili Doritos.

A Worrying Wake-Up Call

In 2018, I was diagnosed with melanoma. It was stage 0, thank goodness, but knowing that I was growing cancer cells, I realized that I needed to truly clean up my diet—to nourish my body with real food and shed the excess weight I'd been carrying for so long. (I weighed around 200 pounds at the time.)

It took more than a year for me to go through with it, but on Feb. 1, 2020, I finally took my own advice and committed to a whole-food, plant-based diet, free of animal products, oil, and highly processed foods.

The COVID-19 pandemic shutdowns allowed me to focus on making my new habits stick. I took up walking daily and eating all my meals at home. Most of all, I was able to be consistent.

I started eating lots of [potatoes](#), [grains](#), [beans](#), salads, and [fruit](#) every day. After decades of eating [highly processed](#), chemically altered foods, it took my taste buds a little while to adjust to this new way of eating. But once they did, WFPB became an effortless part of my daily life.

Within a matter of weeks, I was feeling better than I could remember ever feeling. My mood became noticeably more even-keeled, and my energy levels vastly improved. I started shedding pounds, too. For a long time, I'd resigned myself to being overweight, figuring it was too hard to get in shape after a certain age—but now the weight easily started coming off, even though the only exercise I was doing was walking for 30 minutes a day. And unlike previous diets, on WFPB I noticed that I wasn't having extreme hunger spikes or obsessing about food.

Plant-Based Poster Girl

Over the past year and a half, I've lost 50 pounds. Today I'm like a walking billboard for this lifestyle. I look so different now compared with how I looked only a year and a half ago that friends and family can't help but notice the change. People constantly ask how I did it, and I'm glad to share my story. I hope it inspires them to give it a try, just as others' stories inspired me. This way of eating is not only the best for combating chronic diseases and promoting better mental health; it's also the [most sustainable option for the planet](#). My only regret is not making the switch sooner.

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](#).