



Conquering Addiction to Processed Foods on a Plant-Based Diet

By Evon Dennis
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I struggled with being overweight for most of my adult life. At my heaviest, I was 250 pounds. I managed to shed around 50 pounds after going pescetarian in 2006, but I still had excess weight, along with fatigue and brain fog. Although I went vegetarian in 2015, I ate very few vegetables, opting instead for meatless “chicken” nuggets, soy cheeses, potato chips, waffles, and other foods packed with added sugar, salt, and oil.

A Taste of Better Living

For a 2017 New Year’s resolution, I challenged myself to eliminate [dairy](#) and [highly processed foods](#) from my diet. I stuck with it for 11 days. After that, I had to ask myself: Why, during those 11 days, could I not stop thinking about junk food? I started researching what might be behind these compulsions. I read *The Pleasure Trap* by Alan Goldhamer, DC, and Douglas J. Lisle, PhD, and learned about the addictive nature of refined foods. I also learned about [calorie density](#), and how whole plant foods are lower in calorie density than highly processed and animal foods.

I decided to apply this newfound knowledge and began transitioning to the whole-food, plant-based way of eating. I completely eliminated added salt, oil, refined sugar, and refined flour products, because these were the foods that I was most addicted to. I also cut out alcohol.

I noticed changes—some immediate, some gradual. My energy started increasing. My thinking became clearer. My complexion improved. My nails, which had been splitting, grew stronger. And the excess weight was dropping off. But the most pleasant surprise of all was that I no longer felt driven by addiction to junk foods. The longer I went without them, the less my brain called out for them, and the more freedom I felt.

Committing to a Plant-Based Diet

Some heavy life trauma came my way later in 2017, and I turned back to salty, sugary foods for comfort. But I never forgot the sense of freedom that I had experienced when whole-food, plant-based—and, after a few failed starts, I recommitted to eating this way in January 2020.

Gaining confidence in the kitchen was a challenge. I’d never thought of myself as a good cook.

But I found some delicious whole-food, plant-based recipes online, like potato tacos on lettuce leaves, and I wound up becoming an excellent chef.

Extraordinary Changes

Over the last year, I’ve lost more than 60 pounds. The benefits go deeper than the weight loss: As a result of improved clarity of thinking, I’m now more in tune with my mental health. This is important, as I’ve been diagnosed with bipolar disorder, anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Last summer, I battled exhausting depression symptoms for about five weeks. It was not a new experience, but this time I was able to recognize what was happening and have the presence of mind to dramatically increase my self-care.

Eating the whole plant foods I love; abstaining from salt, oil, flour, alcohol, and sugar; and staying well-hydrated have all gone a long way in cutting my junk-food cravings. These days I keep it pretty simple when it comes to what I eat. I love baked potatoes and sweet potatoes, especially topped with mushrooms (which I sauté in their own juices). I enjoy oatmeal and other [whole grains](#), and I eat a lot of [apples](#), [bananas](#), pineapples, and other fruits.

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Learning how to sustain this way of eating has changed my life in such extraordinary ways. I'm a single mom to two daughters, ages 25 and 17. My 17-year-old has had a front-row seat to my journey and has been inspired to make some changes for her health, too.

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](#).