



## Catching up with Weight-Loss Warrior Chef AJ

By Karen Asp  
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*Photo by Jamie Everhart*

Chef AJ is a force to be reckoned with. Since overcoming her own struggles with obesity and food addiction after adopting a whole-food, plant-based diet, she's been on a mission to help others do the same, through public speaking engagements, multiple books (including *The Secrets to Ultimate Weight Loss*), and a steady stream of [delicious and nutritious recipes](#). Today, the 61-year-old remains fiercely committed to the cause, hosting a daily talk show (Chef AJ LIVE) and organizing the annual [Truth About Weight Loss Summit](#). We chatted with the Vegetarian Hall of Famer about her journey from junk-food vegan to whole-food, plant-based and her advice for others struggling with food addiction.

### **Your own life experiences have inspired your work in helping others to lose weight. Can you share a bit about that?**

**Chef AJ:** When you see the empty seats at my holiday table, you'll understand why I'm so passionate about this. I've lost every family member except one, all of whom passed too young from preventable and reversible lifestyle diseases caused by their obesity.

### **What started your vegan journey?**

**AJ:** I was a freshman in college studying to become a veterinarian. Because I was on a work scholarship, I had to work for a veterinarian, who handed me a tank of live salamanders the first day and told me to cut their heads off. I didn't want to do it, but because I was afraid that if I disobeyed I would lose my job and scholarship, I cut the head off one, and it was one of the worst experiences. That second, in 1977, I became an ethical vegan and promised God I would never harm one of His creatures again. I gave up all animals and became a junk-food vegan. I was basically living on Coke Slurpees and Dr. Pepper. Over time, I had to accept I was a sugar addict and needed to go somewhere to get off that drug, so I did.

### **You advocate a low-fat, plant-exclusive diet free of added sugars, oils, flour, alcohol, and salt. Why do you recommend this particular form of plant-based diet?**

**AJ:** I focus on these substances because they fool the brain's satiety mechanism and cause people to overeat. [Some of these ingredients] are extremely calorically dense. At 4,000 calories per pound, oil is the most calorically and nutritionally bereft food on the planet. I've always advocated doing the least-restrictive thing you can do that will get you the results you want, but for many people, [those substances] trigger an addictive response, and they can't moderate their use of them.

### **What benefits did you experience once you adopted a low-fat, plants-only diet, free of processed foods?**

**AJ:** The benefits were immediate. My skin was clearer, as was my thinking, and I gained a calm brain, no longer a victim of the pleasure trap when I was constantly obsessing about food and eating. I love the food I eat, and it clearly loves me back, because it's kept me at my trim, ideal body weight for over 10 years.

### **Can you speak to the debate surrounding food addiction?**

**AJ:** There are some medical doctors and clinicians who do not believe that food addiction is a real phenomenon, which makes it even harder for patients to seek treatment and find recovery. ... But some people are vulnerable to the effects of highly processed and refined foods, and for these folks, it is very much like an addiction. In some ways it's even harder to

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quit—because while no one needs to smoke cigarettes or drink alcohol, everyone does have to eat. And even people who are not overweight can suffer just as much from the inability to abstain from these foods.

### What does a typical day of eating look like for you?

**AJ:** I wake up around 6 a.m. but don't get hungry until noon. Lunch is often Hannah yams roasted, with a side of broccoli—and by side, I mean a pound. Dinner is focused on starches and vegetables. If I'm still hungry, I'll have fruit for dessert.

### What's the most important strategy for readers who want to lose weight or get healthy through plants-only eating?

**AJ:** You need to have a clean food environment in your house. Remember that if it's in your house, it's in your mouth.

*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](#).*