



# From Hot Dog King to Whole-Food, Plant-Based: My 210-Pound Weight-Loss Journey

By Joel Christiana  
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My weight problems first started in my 30s, when I opened a hot dog stand at a mall and began eating most of my meals at the food court. I changed careers in 2008, but my diet didn't get any better. I started most days with a bacon, egg, and [cheese](#) sandwich and a large coffee with sugar and milk. A typical lunch was a huge Italian hero sandwich with french fries and a Diet Coke (or two). Dinner would be pizza, cheeseburgers, steak, or chicken.

Over the years, the weight just kept coming. I tried every diet I could think of, from points-counting programs to "clean" eating regimens centered on grilled chicken and salads. I'd lose some weight, but I could never keep it off.

## The Epiphany

On June 19, 2017, I woke up feeling terrible, after having two marinated steaks for dinner the night before. I weighed 420 pounds. It was a month before my 50th birthday, and I remember lying in bed thinking, "There aren't too many 80-year-olds who weigh 400 pounds. I need to do something about my health." It occurred to me that a vegan diet was the only thing I hadn't tried. I suddenly turned to my wife and said, "I'm never eating another animal product again." She asked me what I meant, and I repeated the statement. It surprised us both, but I felt so confident about it. It was like an epiphany. In that instant, I went fully vegan.

## Trial and Error

The first week, I ate mostly salads and steamed vegetables and did some juicing. I realized I'd need more sustenance, so I started doing research online and came across videos from [Michael Greger, MD](#), explaining whole-food, plant-based (WFPB) nutrition. From there, things opened up for me, as I discovered WFPB recipes and began experimenting in the kitchen.

After years of eating salty, fatty foods, it took my taste buds a few weeks to adjust, but I was determined. And I felt great. I was sleeping better, and I didn't feel the need to nap during the day. Within a month, I shed 20 pounds. After two months, I'd lost 40 pounds. I took to walking 1 mile a day with my dogs, and as the weight dropped, I walked farther and farther. I hit a plateau at around 350 pounds, so in 2019, I bought a hybrid bike and added that to my exercise routine. From there, I continued losing weight.

## Living Vibrantly

In the five years since I made the switch to WFPB, I have lost 210 pounds and seen huge improvements in my health overall. I was able to discontinue a [blood pressure](#) medication that I'd been taking. My [skin](#) is more vibrant. I no longer suffer from brain fog. I have more energy now than I did in my 20s.

Now, a typical day starts with lemon water and a smoothie, a bowl of oatmeal or overnight oats with fresh berries. Lunch is soup or a salad. (Chickpea "tuna" salad is a favorite.) I enjoy making my own peanut butter and chia seed jam, which I like to spread on a brown rice cake for a snack. Dinner might be panko-crusted cauliflower steaks with a side of sweet potato wedges, or lentil sloppy Joes with brown rice.

After seeing my health transformation, a few of my family members and friends have asked me to help them go WFPB, too. One of my friends was able to dramatically lower his [cholesterol](#) after making the switch. My buddies joke that they can't believe the Hot Dog King is telling them how to go vegan.

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Last summer, I completed my first century bike ride, riding 100 miles in nine hours without stopping. Before going WFPB, I never imagined that I could do something like that. But I did it without any hesitation.

My only regret is not eating this way my whole life.

## My 7 Tips for Healthy Weight Loss

After seeing me shed more than 200 pounds over the past few years, friends, family, and doctors have asked me for advice on losing weight naturally. Here are my best tips.

1. Drink 20 ounces of water first thing in the morning, and drink a glass of water before and with every meal. We are usually thirsty more often than hungry.
2. Make your house a temptation-free zone. Purge your kitchen of all unhealthy foods.
3. Always have healthy meals and snacks ready to go. On Sundays, I steam vegetables and batch-cook lentils, brown rice, and other staples that I use throughout the week. I also make sure to always have cut-up fruit and overnight oats in the fridge.
4. When eating meals, put your fork down between bites and take a pause.
5. Make ample use of fresh herbs and dried spices, which add flavor without adding salt or fat.
6. Do some form of exercise every day. I recommend going for at least a 20-minute walk after a meal, especially dinner.
7. Don't weigh yourself every day, as it can be discouraging. Healthy weight loss is a marathon, not a sprint.

*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](#).*