



I Went Vegan for the Animals. I Cut Out Highly Processed Foods for My Health

By Denise DeSerio
2023-03-30 18:28:47



My father ran a slaughterhouse, so my family ate a lot of meat when I was growing up. I couldn't wait to move out and live on my own so that I could become a vegetarian. When I finally did, though, I started gaining weight. I was surprised. "How could this be?" I thought. "Everyone knows vegetarians are all healthy and slim!" A big part of the problem was [cheese](#). I loved it so much, and living in Wisconsin, "America's Dairyland," didn't help curb my appetite.

I learned about veganism at some point, and I realized that cutting out cheese would probably be a good move not just from an animal rights standpoint but also for my health. So I tried going vegan, many times. I failed. I just wanted cheese, cheese, cheese. I felt like I could never really give it up.

From Vegetarian to Vegan

In 2011, I watched the [Forks Over Knives](#) documentary and decided to finally cut out all animal products, including cheese, for good.

But I still couldn't shake my craving for [ultraprocessed foods](#). I ate a lot of fake meats and oil-laden fake cheeses, and my weight crept up over the years. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, I found myself leading a more sedentary lifestyle, and I reached 340 pounds. It was so frustrating!

Looking back, I find it interesting that It was so easy for me to alter my food choices based on what was best for

animals, but it was much more difficult to do so for my own health. I knew I needed a mental reset.

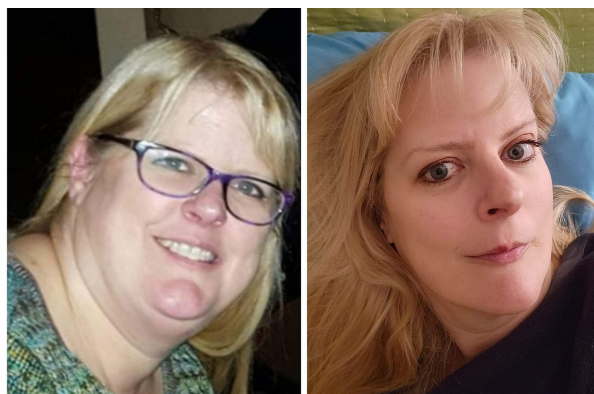
From Vegan to Whole-Food, Plant-Based

In February 2021, I revisited *Forks Over Knives* and read books on whole-food, plant-based (WFPB) nutrition, including *How Not to Die* by Michael Greger, MD. I also worked through my psychological issues related to food.

Once I began eating whole-food, plant-based, I found that the weight started coming off easily. What surprised me the most about the transition was how easy it was to cook WFPB. It wasn't as complicated as I'd feared. Another shock was just how quickly I began to feel better. Within two short weeks, my energy level noticeably improved! This helped me to keep on track.

Since making the change, I've lost 180 pounds. I have so much more energy now! I've had many friends and colleagues approach me with curiosity about eating WFPB. I love sharing recipes with them and bringing WFPB dishes in to potlucks at work.

Finally, for the first time, I feel like I'm setting a good example: living proof that a vegan/WFPB diet doesn't just help the animals; it can also help *you* live your best life!



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March 30 2023

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](#).