



Breaking the Cycle of Deprivation: I Lost Weight and Resolved Several Health Issues on a WFPB Diet

By Shauné Hayes
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I hail from Kansas City, Missouri (a town known for its barbecue), and grew up on the standard American diet, with lots of meat, cheese, dairy, eggs, white bread, and sugary and high-fat [processed foods](#).

I struggled with being overweight from an early age. I joined my first weight-loss program at 12, setting off a decades-long cycle of yo-yo and fad dieting. I tried any new diet that was touted to help with weight loss. I was always trying to figure out how to get healthy and always on some plan or program. Eating became a very regimented part of my life, from severely restricting my calories and meticulously weighing my food to tracking everything I ate. I would have some success with losing weight, but nothing sustainable. If I lost any weight, I'd soon gain it back. My weight-loss attempts were always about achieving a goal, never about building better habits or a healthier lifestyle.

Opportunity for Change

Over the years, as I made poor diet choices, I experienced weight gain; [elevated blood pressure](#) (hypertension stage 1), [cholesterol](#), and blood sugar; chronic arthritis, joint pain, and muscle fatigue; frequent heartburn; low energy; and poor sleep. I also had [PCOS](#) ([polycystic ovary syndrome](#)) and struggled with infertility. I was on medications for five of these conditions.

In 2017, my weight had gotten up to 278, and I was still

in poor health and at a very low place in my life. I remembered hearing someone say, “The lowest moment is when everything changes. When you are suffering, there is an opportunity for change.”

Early that summer, I finally began my journey to wellness. I got into green smoothies and started taking regular walks with a friend. In the fall, I started working with a health coach, who helped me transition to a [whole-food, plant-based \(WFPB\) lifestyle](#). This was a pivotal moment for me. For the first time in my life, I began to understand what healthy eating was and was not. In the past, I had made it about dieting, deprivation, counting calories, and weighing everything. It was a very rigid approach, and I never enjoyed myself—and this is why I'd never stick to any diet for long!

After working with my health coach and learning about a WFPB lifestyle, I redefined my relationship with food and started to see it for its real purpose: optimal nutrition and joy.

The Healing Power of a WFPB Diet

As I adopted a WFPB diet, I noticed amazing changes. Between 2017 and 2020, I lost 100 pounds naturally. My energy and sleep improved. My blood pressure, cholesterol and A1C (a measure of average blood sugar) returned to normal ranges. I eliminated all symptoms of PCOS. The heartburn, fatigue, and joint pain I'd been experiencing for years slowly dissipated, and I was able to safely come off all the medications I'd been on. This surprised me the most, because all I'd done was fix the food!

Following a WFPB diet has significantly improved my quality of life overall. In addition to being free of chronic health conditions, I have more energy. I exercise consistently, typically five or six days a week.

This lifestyle has also inspired the cook within. I now love to cook and create spice blends to flavor my dishes in exotic ways. I even completed a plant-based culinary program to learn more about plant-based cooking. [Grain bowls](#) are one of my favorite things to make. I change up

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the ingredients, but every bowl features a whole grain, lots of vegetables, and one of my signature sauces or dressings.

Paying It Forward

Today I try to do all I can to spread the word about the health benefits of a WFPB diet. I earned a certificate in plant-based nutrition and became a certified health coach and [Food for Life](#) instructor with a nonprofit that provides nutrition and cooking classes to the public. I love teaching people how diet can fight disease and showcasing how versatile this lifestyle is. I also started an online WFPB community to share information and to help grow the movement. I love giving back to my community!

I'm so grateful that I chose to follow a plant-based diet. It changed—and saved—my life.

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](#).