



Goodbye, GERD and Arthritis Pain: I'm Thriving in My 50s on a Plant-Based Diet

By Richard Ferrandino
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As a kid growing up in the '70s, I typically had sugary cereal or bacon and eggs for breakfast. Lunch was usually something like ham and cheese or roast beef sandwiches, and dinner was more meat—steak, pork chops, chicken, etc. My mom was obese, and I was pudgy as a kid, so I was given skim milk to drink with my Twinkies and Oreos, and at some point frozen yogurt took the place of good old-fashioned ice cream.

Once I hit puberty I started to work out with weights and run track, so as a young man I was relatively fit, and I stayed that way through early adulthood. When my wife and I got married in the early '90s, I weighed around 185 pounds. But after a year of doughnuts and ice cream every day, I got up to 215 pounds. I decided to cut out the doughnuts, replacing them with mixed nuts, and my wife and I made ice cream a weekends-only treat. After that, I got back down to 185 pounds.

In the early 2000s, I developed [irritable bowel syndrome \(IBS\)](#) and [gastroesophageal reflux disease \(GERD\)](#). I was prescribed Protonix, which made me not feel the gastrointestinal issues at all. But I didn't like the idea of being on a daily medication, so after a few months, I decided to discontinue it. At the same time, I stopped having my daily six to eight cups of coffee (which were really more like cups of sugar, with coffee and cream). That seemed to help.

One day, after hours of cutting thick shrubs and removing them from the ground, I found myself experiencing intense shoulder pain. My shoulders had

occasionally bothered me since I dislocated them while skiing and playing sports as a teen, but I was mostly able to manage it, up until that day. I went to an orthopedic doctor, who told me that I had severe [arthritis](#) in my shoulders and that it would bother me quite often. The doctor gave me three choices: I could receive injections, undergo surgery, or simply avoid doing what made them hurt. So I went with the last option, and decided to just not do what made them hurt, at least not for a whole day.

In 2019, my wife introduced me to *The Rich Roll Podcast*, which led me to [watch Forks Over Knives](#) and [The Game Changers](#). I came across the work of some amazing people, including [Michael Greger, MD](#), [Will Bulsiewicz, MD](#), [Rip Esselstyn](#), and from all the books, articles, and podcasts I was reading and listening to, it became abundantly clear that WFPB was the way to go. It offered the trifecta: good for my health, good for the health of the planet, and good for animals. I cut out all animal products overnight, taking a more gradual approach to cutting out highly processed foods.

My wife has been so supportive, preparing meals that are predominantly WFPB, even while she still consumes some animal products. I feel very fortunate, and I'm very grateful to her. Going out to eat can be challenging, but I deal with it. It's great when there is an actual vegan option on the menu.

4 Years Later, Sharing the Plant-Based Message

(continued)

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Recently, I attended the International Conference on Nutrition and Medicine and got to meet Dr. Greger!

I've stuck with it for almost four years now. I feel great and people say I look great. Now it's very rare for me to notice the arthritis in my shoulders. I never feel like I need to count calories or worry about eating too much. I feel fit and trim without exercising excessively. I walk daily with my wife and our golden retriever, and five mornings a week I do pullups, situps, and pushups. I have not experienced any more gastrointestinal issues; I make sure to drink plenty of water and keep things flowing.

I am about to retire later this year, after 30 years of teaching in public schools. Now I want to teach people strategies that are relevant to their everyday lives and that they can apply immediately to live longer, stronger, and healthier. I don't want to push this lifestyle on anyone, but I want to spread the word as much as I can. I have been gathering resources and educating myself, and I started a blog and YouTube channel so I can start sharing the benefits of WFPB eating.

I heard a great analogy from Dr. Greger about inflammation: If your leg hits the coffee table once, it heals, no big deal—but if you hit it three times a day, every day, you're in trouble. [Chronic inflammation](#) is the root of many of the diseases plaguing Americans, and it can be alleviated by going WFPB.

The planet, too, would be much better off if we just grew plants to feed people, instead of chopping down rainforests to grow food for cattle. Let's heal ourselves and save the world with plants!

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](#).