



It's Never Too Late: How I Improved My Health at Age 80 with a WFPB Diet

By Ardis Coffman
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I didn't expect to improve my health at age 80, but that's what happened. It started in 2018, when my daughter became convinced that she should follow a whole-food, plant-based (WFPB) diet. Since we live and eat together, I agreed, reluctantly, that when it was my turn to cook, I would try to make those kinds of meals for her. I didn't promise not to eat what I wanted when away from our dinner table. I was never fond of vegetables: When I was a child, my own mother despaired that the only ones I would eat were corn and peas, and as an adult, my tastes hadn't changed much.

On my 80th birthday, I was dealing with a host of medical problems. I had been a [Type 2 diabetic](#) for over 20 years, and I'd had [high blood pressure](#) since I was 35. One doctor called it "resistant" high blood pressure, because the standard medicines failed to bring it down. It took five medications at full doses to keep my blood pressure under control. I think it's hereditary; my father died at 31 from repeated small strokes because they couldn't control his blood pressure, and both his sisters were diagnosed with high blood pressure, one of them when she was in her teens. I counted myself lucky that there were medications to help me avoid suffering my father's fate.

On top of high blood pressure and Type 2 diabetes, I had high triglycerides and [high cholesterol](#). And now, on my 80th, I was dealing with the latest bad news from my doctor: I had [chronic kidney disease](#), stage 3C.

Surprising Improvements

Much to my surprise, after only a couple of months of eating WFPB dinners—only dinners!—my A1C improved enough that my doctor started stepping down my diabetes medication, and before long, without fanfare, I was off of all of it.

I [watched the Forks Over Knives documentary](#) and felt my objections to eating vegetables weakening. Then, while browsing my health care provider's website to see what it had to say about my latest diagnosis, chronic kidney disease, I saw that the advice for CKD patients was to avoid animal protein. Here was my medical team saying pretty much exactly what the documentary said. That was it. I was on board. I said goodbye to my beloved bacon-and-egg breakfasts. My daughter happily started making us both steel-cut oats every morning.

My health improvements accelerated. My cholesterol dropped enough that my doctor was able to take me off statins. My limp, thinning hair plumped up, and one day, while going through the motions of putting on makeup, I realized I had eyelashes again; the mascara was actually coating something. My splitting fingernails toughened up. My age spots lightened. My BMI had been in the "obese" range for decades, and I began to lose weight, with ease, at a healthy rate. My kidney numbers turned around. I began to look forward to going to the doctor, knowing my weight would be lower and my blood work would be better, not worse.

Undoing a Family History of Disease

It's been five years since I made the switch. My A1C has been lower than my daughter's for years now (and she's never been diabetic). My total cholesterol is consistently 170 or lower. My kidney numbers continue to look better at each checkup.

Most amazing of all is the improvement in my blood pressure. I didn't think anything could affect my blood pressure this much! Even my skeptical doctor commented, "Your plant-based diet is doing well for your blood pressure." One by one, she has cautiously taken me off medications. I'm down to two, from the five I'd been taking for decades, and my blood pressure is so good that I wouldn't be surprised if she takes me off the final two. It's almost incredible. If only my father had known.

My lunch is often homemade soy yogurt, dressed up with raisins and orange slices. Our favorite dinners are bulgur-wheat pilaf;

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orange tofu; black bean tacos; bean chili; and a lot of variations on brown rice and beans. We also like to do potato bars, where we make baked potatoes and set out different toppings. For holidays, one favorite is a lentil shepherd's pie. We use [Forks Meal Planner](#) and cookbooks by plant-based doctors.

My friends are interested in my successes, and at least two of them have started their own plant-based journeys. Now I'm 85 and in better health than I was at 45. I know I'm not immortal; something is going to take me out eventually. But eating a WFPB diet has given me the chance to enjoy good health until then. I'm so grateful.

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](#).