



I Took 40 Points Off My Cholesterol in Just 3 Weeks on a Plant-Based Diet

By Julia Dunaway
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Growing up, I ate a lot of standard American fare. My mother, who was Japanese, was a fantastic cook, gardener, and artist, and sometimes she would make dishes that she grew up with or food from other types of cuisines, but most nights it was fried chicken, beef stew, or spaghetti.

When I was 10, my father was concerned that I seemed heavier than the other girls in my class. My parents put me on a diet that was all about counting calories. I stayed on some type of weight-loss diet for the next 50 years. It never really worked. I'd deprive myself, lose some weight, then binge and gain it back. I always felt hungry.

I joined the military when I was 19 and remained fairly healthy throughout my 30 years of service. I always carried some extra pounds, but I was never obese. I stayed physically active (with four kids, I was always on the go) and tried to follow a Mediterranean diet.

Cardiovascular Troubles

In my 40s, I was diagnosed with [high cholesterol](#), and my doctor warned me that I'd need to start taking medication if I didn't make some lifestyle changes, but I more or less shrugged it off.

One day in 2007, I was working out at the gym when my head started pounding. I went to the hospital. The doctors found a tumor on the left atrium of my heart, and I had to undergo open-heart surgery. The experience made me more health-conscious, especially in light of

my family history of [heart disease](#), [kidney disease](#), and [Type 2 diabetes](#). After being discharged from the hospital, I thought, "I need to do something." Still, I didn't do anything for quite a while.

Discovering Plant-Based Cooking

I'd always loved cooking and dreamed of becoming a professional chef, and in 2008, while still on active duty, I enrolled in culinary school. After graduating, I started my chef business and began teaching cooking classes.

In 2017, the [Blue Zones Project](#) was looking for chefs to lead plant-based cooking demos in my town of Fort Worth, Texas. I'd read *The Okinawa Program* and *The Blue Zones* years earlier and always had it in the back of my mind that I should try eating more plant-based, so I applied and was chosen to be a local chef in the project. I led cooking demos at various businesses, churches, and schools—but I wasn't ready to adopt a 100% plant-based diet myself just yet.

A Turning Point During the Pandemic

In February 2020, a lipid panel showed that I had a total cholesterol level of 211, LDL of 125, and triglycerides in the 190s. Soon after that, the pandemic hit, and I gained more weight while stuck at home. I felt terrible.

That's when I read *How Not to Diet* by Michael Greger, MD, and learned about his Daily Dozen: a checklist of healthy foods to try to eat every day, including beans, berries, greens, whole grains, and other whole plant foods, while also exercising daily and drinking plenty of water.

I decided to eat nothing but those healthy plant foods for 21 days, and I started exercising 45 minutes a day. I was pleasantly surprised that once I started eating oil-free, whole-food, plant-based (WFPB), I didn't feel hungry all the time.

Results in 3 Weeks

(continued)

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In just three weeks on a plant-based diet, my total cholesterol dropped by 40 points, my LDL dropped by 25 points, and my triglycerides dropped by 80 points. I also lost a few pounds. After seeing those results, I decided to stick with the WFPB way of eating.

Since going all in on WFPB, I've lost 30 pounds—and, more importantly, I've kept the weight off. I walk 5 miles daily and lift weights two hours a week. I'm 69 years old, and I have no aches, pains, or any of the other problems that often plague people in my age group. I enjoy cooking every day and coming up with creative new plant-based dishes, which I share on YouTube. I feel like I've cracked the code for how to lose weight, keep it off, and keep myself in good health, and my purpose in life is to help others do the same.

My Tips for Success in Going WFPB

Over the past few years, I've helped many people make the transition to WFPB. These are my best tips for getting started and sticking with it.

1. Learn to cook.

Restaurant meals and prepackaged meals from the grocery store are often too salty and fatty. The WFPB way of eating is much easier and more enjoyable if you prepare your own food, using seasonal produce and fresh herbs and spices for flavor.

2. Keep it simple.

I like to give people five core recipes that can easily be customized and transformed into other dishes: Think bean chili, veggie burgers, Asian noodles, miso soup with vegetables and tofu, and beans and rice.

3. Find 2 or 3 breakfasts you love.

Try out several, such as hot oatmeal, steel-cut oats, overnight oats, savory grain bowls, sprouted whole grain toast with nut butter, and smoothies with greens.

4. Be willing to stand alone.

Buy-in from family and friends is wonderful, but if you're the only one you know following the plant-based way of eating, it's still possible to succeed. Be positive about your choices, not apologetic. Do what you need to

do even when it's difficult.

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](#).