



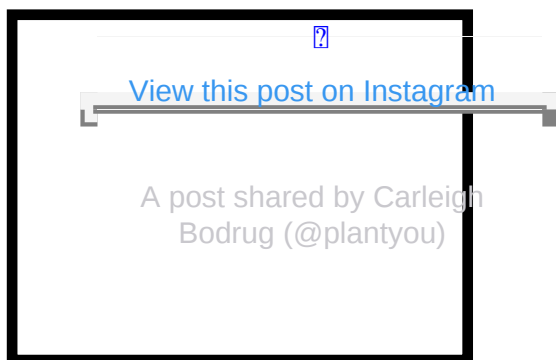
From Incarceration to Plant-Based Powerhouse: Dom Thompson Shares His Remarkable Story

By Courtney Davison
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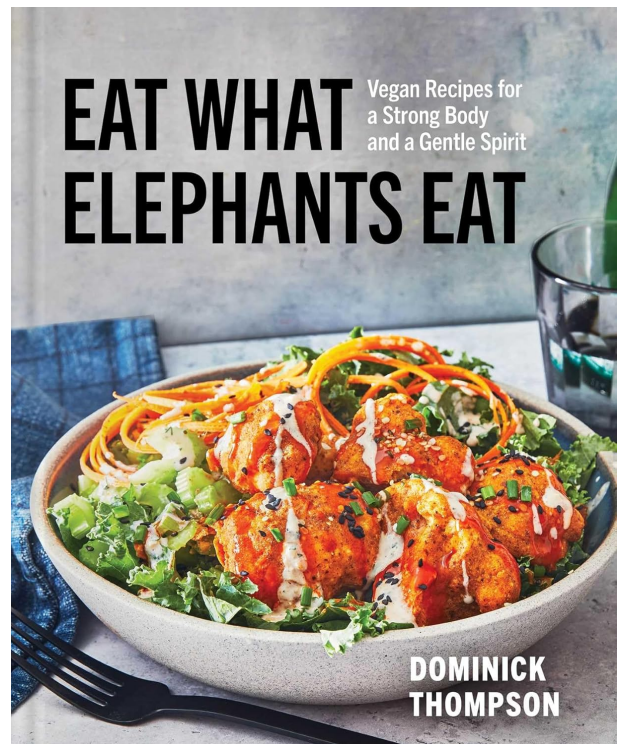
Ironman triathlete, animal rights activist, and entrepreneur Dom Thompson has never been one to sit still. After his release from prison more than two decades ago, while still under house arrest, he began working at a health care company. There, he rose to the executive level and saved up enough money to launch his own brand, Eat What Elephants Eat—all the while rigorously training for marathons and powerlifting competitions.

Today Dom's become a fixture of vegan social media, amassing a quarter of million followers across Instagram and TikTok with posts that touch on animal rights, body positivity, and social justice—featuring lots of appearances from his rescue dog, a scene-stealing husky named Roc.



him that seems to come from clarity of purpose, an ethos he encapsulates in six words: *If it requires harm, then nahh*. The mantra first came to Thompson during his incarceration, at just 21 years old, spurring him to give up meat overnight. “My cellmates thought I was crazy—they couldn’t believe I would trade my animal protein for their carbs,” Thompson says, chuckling.

Now Thompson is sharing his remarkable personal story in a new book: *Eat What Elephants Eat: Vegan Recipes for a Strong Body and a Gentle Spirit*, out January 7. “It’s a hybrid cookbook-autobiography,” says Thompson. “It dives into my ‘why’—how I made this decision to go vegetarian when I was in prison 24 years ago, and also helps you, the reader, identify your why.” It’s also a guide, presenting nutrition research in an easy-to-digest way and laying out three different pathways for adopting a more plant-based diet. The cookbook section is peppered with healthy cooking tips, and many of the recipes are oil-free.



For someone so ambitious, Thompson has an ease about

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We spoke with Thompson about the new book and picked his brain for his go-to workout fuel, tips for sticking with New Year's resolutions, and more. Read on for the full convo—then try out a recipe from the new cookbook, [Dom's "Egg Salad" Collard Wraps](#).

Why elephants?

Dominick Thompson: I guess we could start with the beginning of my love for elephants. In terms of my bloodline, I come from two different tribes, Nigerian and Congo, and that's where elephants are the most protected—at those national parks, specifically. Innately, I feel like I have a [connection] with them. When I started [doing speaking engagements about veganism] years and years ago, I always included a visual aid to show people some of the most iconic vegan mammals. And I always led with elephants. People forget that the largest, strongest and most powerful walking land animals, elephants, eat plants.

One of the other reasons is because when my platform started growing about 10 to 12 years ago, the poaching crisis was at an all-time high in Africa, with respect to the rhinos and the elephants. I wanted to do something with my platform to bring awareness to the anti-poaching efforts. The almighty African elephant represents a lot of different things humans can learn from, including eating plants and having a gentle soul.

In the book, you lay out advice and meal plans for three types of reader: those who want to crowd out some animal foods, those who want to try a vegan diet with faux meats and cheeses, those who want to go all in on a more whole-food vegan diet. Why did you decide to present these three pathways?

DT: I think we need to get back to being real and also being compassionate enough to meet people where they are in their journeys. It feels like for so many years, a lot of people got really dialed into being purists. That's an all-or-nothing approach, and I just don't think you're going to influence many people with that type of approach.

You seem to have always been a vegan at heart.

DT: Yeah. I have always been compassionate at heart from when I was a little boy. I used to break up the dog fights in my neighborhood. ... I'd be in the middle of it and get into these little scuffles too, even with my own friends and homies at the time. They'd be curious to know what a bow and arrow or a handmade slingshot would do to a stray cat. They would shoot at them and I would slap them across the head. ... I've always been a protector of anything that I felt was being harmed or being taken advantage of.

Empathy is a throughline in the book. Can you speak to that?

DT: I think we all, especially now that we live in a very divided society, sometimes aren't able to comprehend or even consider another point of view. I say this all the time, but there are over 8 billion people in this world, all waking up tomorrow with different ideas and different lifestyles. That's what diversity is. We're not going to all get it right and be uniform in our beliefs, and it's OK to sit down to have a conversation with someone that is totally opposite in their views as long as it's respectful.

How did you feel after you first went vegetarian, during your incarceration?

DT: I never took drugs in my life, but the best way to describe it is what people say they experience when they first get a high. I just felt invincible. When I stopped eating meat, the inflammation left my body radically, within weeks. I was over 250 pounds, and suddenly, I was dropping weight. Then my strength and my energy levels [surged]. I felt really in tune with my body in a way that I never had before. I was able to see my abs and see my leg muscles. My body just felt very strong, in an effortless way. ... I'm still a very healthy, strong guy, but that first couple days to weeks when I stopped eating meat in prison was really incredible. What I experienced—from my mental health, down to the body that my soul occupies—it was one of the best feelings I ever felt.

(continued)

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our [Plant-Based Primer](#). For meal-planning support, check out [Forks Meal Planner](#), FOK's easy weekly meal-planning tool to keep you on a healthy plant-based path.

“Egg Salad” Collard Wraps from Thompson’s new cookbook, *Eat What Elephants Eat*

In the book you write about redefining soul food. What does that mean to you?

DT: Historically, much of what has been called soul food [is] the food that was deemed inedible by slave masters and was passed on as scraps to my ancestors. Many black creators and chefs, not just me, are redefining soul food cuisine into something that’s more whole and plant-based, and that’s not associated with the [unhealthy animal-based foods] that we were eating back in slavery.

Do you have a favorite pre-workout snack?

DT: For cardiovascular [workouts], I like to juice beets and watermelon together. It’s a really good energy booster drink, and it really fuels the body with a lot of natural electrolytes. For strength-training, I love a really good 16- to 24-ounce smoothie full of hemp seeds and homemade oat milk with some bananas, frozen strawberries, and peanut powder. ... I add a little bit of maple syrup or dates, and that’s a really good pre-workout for strength-training.

Any advice for folks who are trying to stick to a health-minded New Year’s resolution but fumble here and there?

DT: I would say don’t give up on yourself. It’s OK. Life is truly, truly, and I mean this wholeheartedly, a marathon. It’s not a sprint. And it’s OK to take your time. As long as you’re doing it and you’re in motion, you’ll get to your goals.

Editor’s note: This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

To learn more about a whole-food, plant-based diet, visit