



After Cutting Out Ultraprocessed Vegan Foods, I'm Pain-Free and 80 Pounds Lighter

By Jolie Blanche Levene Pryor
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Jolie Blanche Levene-Pryor thought that following a vegan diet would help her reach a healthy weight. But it wasn't until she committed to a whole-food, plant-based diet—cutting out highly processed foods and added oils—that she shed more than 80 pounds and eliminated chronic pain.

My journey away from a standard American diet began in 2009, when my wife and I read a book that detailed the horrible treatment of animals in factory farms and decided to go pescatarian together. I continued to struggle with obesity, as I had for decades. I weighed over 270 pounds at my heaviest, filling out 3XL tops and size 22/24 pants. In 2011, I underwent lap band and plication surgery, with the hope of finally being able to manage my weight.

Post-surgery, I read books and watched documentaries about veganism, as I had friends who lost around 40 pounds after going [vegan](#). I became convinced that going vegan would solve all my weight problems, too, so my wife and I eliminated all remaining animal products from our diets.

But I kept preparing meals in the standard American style, just swapping out the meat for a [highly processed](#) vegan meat alternative. I used olive oil with reckless abandon. I was disappointed not to lose weight. It never occurred to me that I'd traded one set of crappy foods for another.

Struggling with Side Effects

I continued to struggle with my weight for years. The lap band was so tight it also caused me extreme acid reflux, leading to vomiting. Finally, I saw another doctor who begrudgingly drained the fluid from my lap band, which eased most of its restrictive effect on my stomach. He prescribed me a weight-loss medication, and I got down to 194 pounds. There were side effects—my ears rang, I couldn't sleep, and I had severe constipation—but the pill was working, so I tolerated it. After a few months of bowel movements so painful that I cried, I discontinued the medication. I regained the weight I'd lost and felt incredibly defeated.

In April 2021 my wife and I started working with a health coach. He taught us how bad ultraprocessed foods were for us. I cleaned out our pantry and freezer and gave away all of our junk foods and oils and [restocked the kitchen with whole foods](#). After a few months, I noticed that chronic knee pain I'd had for years started to dissipate (which was surprising, as an orthopedic surgeon had told me that the “damage was done” and I'd need knee replacements).

Heeding the Wake-up Call

I slowly let the oils and processed foods back into our lives due to convenience. Then my wife saw her cardiologist for a calcium scoring test. Since we had been vegan for many years, I assumed her score would be excellent—but it turned out to be 694 (meaning she was at very high risk of heart attack). That's when I said, “I'm all in.” I immediately got rid of all our cooking oils, ultraprocessed foods, and any seasonings that contained salt. In March 2023, we did Chef AJ's 21-Day Challenge to go [whole-food, plant-based](#) and never looked back.

Thriving on a Whole-Food, Plant-Based Lifestyle

Since then, I've lost 83 pounds. Today I weigh 124 pounds—the same as I did in high school! I had my lap band removed. I've still got my original knees, and

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they're pain-free.

This lifestyle allows me to eat more food than I ever have, while effortlessly maintaining a healthy weight. I absolutely adore roasted sweet potatoes, oats, brown rice, and all sorts of beans.

My wife and I made this journey together, and I'm so grateful for her. She has lost 50 pounds since we transitioned to an oil-free, whole-food, plant-based way of life (and 128 pounds in total, on our long weight-loss journey).

One of my closest friends followed suit and has lost over 60 pounds and resolved chronic health conditions. I'm incredibly proud.

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](#).