



From Unhealthy to World-Champion Powerlifter on a Plant-Based Diet

By Ben Rayland
December 08 2015

As a strength coach, personal trainer, and powerlifter, I spent most of my adult life lifting weights and churning through thousands of calories like a furnace, each and every day. My adult weight always fluctuated between 220 and 260 pounds, and I thought I was in the shape of my life. However, in October of 2012, at the young age of 32, a routine exam with bloodwork changed my life forever ...

“Please give us a ring back, as we need to talk about your cholesterol numbers,” was the message on my voicemail. Unfortunately, this story is all too familiar for most adult Americans. My LDL cholesterol was too high. My HDL was too low. Even though I was fit, I wasn’t as healthy as I had previously thought. Thankfully, the nurses at my doctor’s office were brutally honest: “You’re a weightlifter. You work out a lot and create a huge need for calories, but you’re eating the wrong foods,” they said. “Cut down on junk food, candy, eggs, and red meat. We want to see you again in six months.”

I was floored. My whole life had been dedicated to fitness. Now my bloodwork was telling me that I was in no better shape than most of the people I’d spent my life trying to help! I set out immediately to make a change.

A lunch date with some relatives ended up being the catalyst for that change. They led a plant-based lifestyle and recommended that I watch the documentary film *Forks Over Knives*. I watched the movie that weekend and was absolutely enthralled! What particularly fascinated me was Dr. T. Colin Campbell’s research about animal protein. I wondered if going plant-based and reducing my animal protein could work to make me healthier as well.

Going Plant-Based and Finding True Health

At this point, my wife, a long-time vegetarian, was transitioning to a fully plant-based diet herself. We began eating more and more plant-based meals at home and decreasing our consumption of animal products. The results were astounding! I first dropped 15 pounds then leveled off. Then 15 more. Then leveled off again. My

weight continued to staircase downward, until I finally settled at 165 pounds ... a full 87 pounds less than I was ten years ago, at the time of my honeymoon (when the above “before” photo was taken). I am grateful for the support system I had in place at home; without it, I’m not sure my dietary transformation would have been possible.

I continued a 95:5 plant-to-animal ratio for about a year, gradually weaning myself from the animal products I’d eaten habitually my entire life. One year ago, I decided to take the final step and give up animal products completely. Because of the calories demanded by my job as a strength coach, I adopted the principles in Dr. John McDougall’s book, *The Starch Solution*. Using McDougall’s program, 75 to 80% of my daily calories come from starch: potatoes, rice, bananas, oats, beans, are now staples of my diet ... accompanied, of course, by tons of vegetables,

My wellness goals have shifted from being fit to being healthy. Instead of trying to pack on as much muscle as possible, I’m now focusing on longevity and quality of life. And I’m happy to report that the strategy is paying off: My energy levels have never been higher (helpful for chasing my three sons around the house, which is no easy task!). And I haven’t been sick in years ... not even a sniffle!

As for that powerlifting thing, I still compete from time to time. My plant-based diet has actually made me a stronger lifter. Even at a much lower weight class, I’m more powerful at 35 than I was at 25. I was the 100% RAW Deadlift* World Champion in the 165-pound weight class last year (in 2014). But every week someone still asks me if I’m getting enough protein!

*Raw deadlift = deadlift performed without the aid of a deadlifting suit.

(continued)

From Unhealthy to World-Champion Powerlifter on a Plant-Based Diet

By Ben Rayland
December 08 2015

