



# Plant-Based Athlete: What Happened When I Stopped Eating Two Pounds of Meat Per Day

By Luke Tan  
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Growing up in Singapore, I was one of the “fat” kids in class. My classmates called me a “double scoop ice cream with a cherry on top.” (The cherry was my head.) I was also plagued with chronic asthma, epilepsy, and kidney disease, and the medications I took for these ailments left me borderline obese.

I was always a big meat eater. When I went to my grandmother’s house for Sunday lunch, my aunt would prepare an individual serving of 8 to 10 fried chicken wings for me. On weekends, I would ask my parents to take me to the American diner, where I’d order a ribeye steak or baby back ribs. I loved Western food.

“High protein” continued to be the norm for me in adulthood. This was especially true when I entered the fitness industry in 2009 as a trainer and bodybuilder. At my meat-eating prime, I was consuming over 2 pounds of meat, poultry, or seafood each day to achieve lean muscle gain. My typical week would look like this: Monday: fish (2.6lbs); Tuesday: turkey (2lbs); Wednesday: lamb (2.2lbs); Thursday: beef (1.6lbs); Friday: chicken (2.2lbs); Saturday: seafood (2.2lbs); Sunday: pork (2lbs).

Along with that, I was also spending a fortune on supplements ranging from fish oils to specific vitamins and minerals (vitamins C and D3, zinc, magnesium, etc.) to pre-workout pills and fat burners.

This all changed in 2011.

Initially, I was inspired by my wife Emilie, who was vegan. She shared with me her two favorite reads, *The Food Revolution* by John Robbins and *Vegan Bodybuilding & Fitness* by Robert Cheeke. These books opened my eyes to how a plant-based diet was more ethical, sustainable, and healthy. The penny really dropped when I watched the film *Earthlings*. A passive interest suddenly became a conviction—I turned vegan overnight for the animals.

## Plant-Based Performance and Health

I still remember sitting in the locker room of my gym,

having my first vegan meal: stir-fried tofu and some vegetables. I was mocked by a couple of trainers, but I paid no attention to it. I continued to focus on reading and learning all I could about this new lifestyle I was embarking on.

Over the first month or so, I noticed that my overall muscularity increased. My body had been starved of nutrients (and carbs) for the longest time, and it was finally getting nourished. A few months later, and without much effort, I dropped body fat without changing my exercise regime. Not only did I become leaner and more defined, but I also had a lot more energy and was training for twice as long and recovering twice as fast. As my body detoxified, my skin cleared up, and joint issues that had always been a problem for me almost disappeared. I went from hating the word “cardio” because I lacked energy to running 8 to 10 kilometers at a time, which became one of my favorite activities outside the gym. I never expected such a shift in physiology and mind-set just through changing what I had on my plate.

I never thought I would experience such an awakening, a paradigm shift from a reductionistic to a holistic approach to my nutrition. I now look to plant-based whole foods for my source of fuel and nourishment—I’ve gone from eating a kilo (2.2 pounds) of meat and a cabinet chock-full of supplements to enjoying green smoothie blends, healthy rice and veggie dishes, and mounds of tropical fruit. Not only has my health and physical performance improved, but I have developed an immense drive to spread the message of plant-based health and fitness as well.

In 2013, I competed in the Australian Natural Bodybuilding Championships as a vegan and placed second in my division. I then competed and won my division in the Naturally Fit Games in Austin, Texas. I am now focused on building my vegan fitness brand and my personal coaching company with my wife, who is a certified raw-food chef and vegan ultra-endurance athlete. We are committed to helping individuals achieve optimal health while supporting the planet’s ecology.

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My journey over the past four years has been incredible. I now realize that positive change in life and in the world begins with what you have on your plate!

