How I Cured My Chronic Pain with a Whole-Food, Plant-Based Diet

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For most of my life, I ate the standard American diet and meals that were heavy in meat and processed foods. About four years ago, I decided to go vegan for the animals. I stopped eating meat and dairy products for ethical reasons, but my lifelong allergies went away soon after I went vegan! It was an unexpected and happy surprise.

Although I was vegan, I was far from a healthy eater. I ate a lot of processed foods, potato chips, convenience meals, and loved Oreos and Nutter Butter cookies. There was a lot of sugar, oil, and salt in my diet. Even though my allergies had cleared up after switching my diet, I still had many health problems.

I had suffered with endometriosis pain for about 20 years, had struggled with debilitating back pain for ten years, and also had recurring chronic pain in my hands, feet, legs, and neck. Despite going to many doctors, no one could figure out how to help me. There were days when I couldn't get out of bed, and specialists usually wanted me to manage my pain with strong painkillers and pharmaceuticals. Several doctors also recommended back surgery.

Last summer, one of my friends convinced me to do a 30-day challenge and eat only whole-food vegan meals for a month. She is an ethical vegan but also focuses on whole foods, which means she doesn't eat junk food. She's also very youthful and energetic. Since I felt like I was aging quickly and was so sick all the time, I agreed. She asked me to kickoff the challenge by going with her to the Columbia, Md Forks Over Knives Meetup group. I had no idea what Forks Over Knives was at the time.

I went to the group with her, which was a potluck with 80 people and about 80 different dishes. Some of the food was really great and I was shocked. The desserts blew me away. I also noticed that the older members seemed so healthy. It was a motivating way to start off my 30 days eating a whole-food, plant-based diet.

The potluck was on a Sunday in July. I woke up the next Tuesday morning and thought I was dying. I felt numb and extremely confused. I hadn't been without pain for at least a decade and didn't recognize the feeling. I also hadn't been able to sit up easily after waking up in many years. I contacted the friend who had convinced me to do the 30-day challenge and told her I was probably dying. She told me the pain was gone because I had reduced inflammation in my body.

I had no idea what inflammation was or what she was talking about, but it felt like magic. I couldn't believe the absolute change in my body. Once you've been in pain for that long, waking and sitting up with ease feels like freedom. You feel like you have a new life. And walking around with no pain is even more awesome! I was so excited to learn more and to find new recipes and dishes to eat. I started to eat and love sweet potatoes, plant-based pizzas and muffins, and many recipes from the *Vegan Under Pressure* and *Forks Over Knives—The Cookbook*.

Besides the chronic pain, I also had incontinence for a few years. Many people told me this was normal for a 50-year old woman and that I had to accept it. After about one month on my new diet, I realized I had control of my bladder again. Over the next few months, I also lost 25 pounds without trying, my adult acne cleared up, and my endometriosis pain (which I'd had for 20 years) went away. I felt like I'd won the lottery!

I sleep well and wake up every morning at 5:30 feeling amazing. My mood is great and I have a lot of energy. For a 51-year-old woman who used to have trouble getting out of bed in the morning, this is amazing.

I know my story isn't as dramatic as many others I've heard, where people lose 200 pounds or go off a dozen medications, but I feel like I have to share. If you are suffering with chronic health and pain issues, please give this lifestyle an honest 100-percent try for a month and see how you feel. It's worth it!