



# After a Failed LapBand Surgery, I Went On a Plant-Based Diet and Got Off All My Meds

By Melissa Dodd-Ruesing  
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For most of my life, I was a real meat lover. I loved bacon cheeseburgers and had a meat-laden diet which took its toll on me. At my heaviest, I was over 300 pounds. I was morbidly obese and on five medications: prescriptions for reflux and allergies, an antidepressant, thyroid medication, and an estrogen pill for perimenopause. I was also prediabetic, had high blood pressure and high cholesterol, and was diagnosed with fatty liver disease.

I knew I had to do something, but I didn't know what. I was uneducated in nutrition and didn't know where to start. This was in 2010. I knew I wasn't eating enough fruits and vegetables, so I figured I would start there. A friend mentioned Juice Plus (a plant-based supplement) to me, and I started taking that and increased the amount of plant foods I was eating. I lost a few pounds, started to feel better, and felt motivated to exercise. I was able to stop taking my allergy medication within a couple of months, but was still taking my other prescriptions.

## Trying LapBand Surgery

I then had LapBand surgery. About two weeks after the surgery, I started heaving and having contractions in my stomach and esophagus. It was horrible and painful, and I was rushed to the hospital. The surgeon insisted that I have emergency surgery to have the device removed. It turns out I was in the two percent of people whose bodies rejected the device.

After the surgery I had the incision dehiscence (rupture), leaving me with a wound to take care of for the next month. The doctor said my healing time would be close to two months, but I was able to reduce the healing time with my diet. I only took the supplements and ate fruits and vegetables during this time—in whole form or as juice. I had thought that the surgery would be the answer to my health and weight problems, so I was at a loss for what to do next. It was very depressing.

I saw how powerful healthy eating was during my wound recovery. I could also tell, by paying more attention to my diet, that meat contributed to my reflux and digestive problems. Then I went to Mexico with my GoalFriends

(a powerful women's group). One of the group members was my good friend Susan Benigas, co-founder of the [Plantrician Project](#), who started talking to me about plant-based nutrition. She gave all of us a copy of *Healthy Eating, Healthy World* by Jim Hicks. I started reading it on the retreat, and quickly realized I needed to start making changes to my meat and dairy intake. I immediately started to drink my coffee black. My usual morning coffee cup was half coffee and half cream (half-and-half). So I knew if I could make that drastic change, I could change my diet. This was four years ago.

## Getting Off All Prescription Medications

I started slowly transitioning to a plant-based diet and getting involved with the Plantrician Project. I was emotionally attached to my favorite comfort foods, especially cheese, so it wasn't that easy at first. But it's been so worth it. I was able to come off all my prescription medications. I went off my allergy medication first, and then I was able to drop the estrogen and antidepressant medications. Next, I was able to drop the acid reflux meds which I had been on for years and which cost me over \$100 a month. Finally, after two rounds of blood work, I don't need my thyroid medication anymore, which amazed my doctor! Additionally, I dropped 80 pounds over a few years. That feels amazing!

I love beans and lentils and love to experiment with making new sauces and cooking Italian and Indian dishes full of veggies for dinner. I usually have fruit and veggie smoothies for breakfast and a variety of salads for lunch. I also eat a lot of greens and even grow my own. Everything I eat now makes me feel good. I used to struggle with acid reflux or feeling sleepy or tired after eating, and now I feel great after meals.

I can now keep up with my kids and their activities and have more energy than ever! I love to ride my bicycle, play golf, walk, and run. I plan to run a 5k with my kids, and I am also raising money and running in the St. Jude Marathon this year. I have a career in physical therapy, [own a small business](#), and life is good. I am passionate about helping others and love to tell people: "It's not

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about what you can't eat, it's about what you *can!*"  
Exploring plant-based foods is delicious and fun.