



From Crippling Lupus to Living Pain-Free on a Plant-Based Diet

By Jami Heymann
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In my Facebook memories today, there was a picture from a vacation two years ago. It was a picture of pulled pork tacos with melted Cheddar cheese and a Bloody Mary with bacon-infused vodka. That picture was the end of one era and the beginning of another. That was my last meal with meat. I had watched *Forks Over Knives* the week before and committed myself to going vegetarian (not yet vegan) when I returned from vacation. After that meal, I returned home and never touched a piece of meat again. When I look at that picture today, I honestly feel repulsed by it!

Over the course of the next year, I avoided meat entirely but continued to eat dairy products, processed foods, oil, and sugar. I gradually got to a point where I chose to avoid those foods on the weekdays but allow them on the weekends. Those weekends sometimes included Monday and maybe even Tuesday. I began to have some medical issues and a few strange episodes that led me to see a neurologist in June 2016.

The neurologist ran extensive blood work and ordered an EEG. The results were not good. The blood work showed very elevated autoimmune antibodies, and the EEG showed that I had been experiencing partial seizures. She put me on seizure medication and wanted to repeat the blood work in September before referring me to a rheumatologist. I began to experience gradually worsening joint pain and thought it might be a side effect of the medication. I went off the medication, but the pain only got worse.

Some days my hands and fingers were so painful and swollen that I could barely move them. I was terrified. I write extensive psychological reports for my job as a licensed specialist in school psychology. How was I going to write if I couldn't move my fingers? I discussed this privately with my boss, who suggested using dictation software. This only amplified my fear that I might be disabled for the rest of my life.

In September, the neurologist ran my blood work again. The results were exactly the same, and I was referred to the "best rheumatologist" in my large city. On my way to the appointment on November 15, 2016, I cried nonstop

just knowing that the news would be bad. After my examination, the rheumatologist looked me in the eye and told me I had lupus. I called my loved ones, crying because I didn't know what future lay ahead of me. Then I went home, re-watched *Forks Over Knives*, and read every single success story I could find about individuals who had overcome an autoimmune disease.

Many success stories had a common theme: a whole food, plant-based vegan diet with no oil, salt, or sugar. Some people had also eliminated gluten.

For the first time in months, I felt hopeful. On that day, I changed my diet for good. I cut out all animal products, oil, salt, sugar, gluten, and even coffee. Within a week, my finger pain had diminished. Over the next few months, my overall pain, hair loss, and extreme fatigue gradually lessened until the day I realized I felt normal again. There were days that I even forgot that I had lupus. And, I have not had a seizure in the last year and a half.

Today, nine months after my diagnosis, I feel totally healthy and normal, with no symptoms of lupus. I am 100 percent compliant on this diet, even on the weekends! I lost 10 pounds and take no medication at all. I walk three to four days a week and do resistance training at home with small weights.

I eat out and travel extensively, always sticking with my WFPB lifestyle. My partner, my friends, and my family know that wherever we go I will order a plant-based dish and request no oil. I have learned to research restaurants ahead of time so I know what to expect and what to order. I love to talk about my eating habits and how it has changed my life. I have insisted that my friends and family watch the *Forks Over Knives* documentary so they understand exactly why I am doing what I am doing and how it can benefit them as well. As a result, I have inspired many others to explore the WFPB path.