



I'm a Weight-Loss Therapist Who Struggled with Obesity—Until I Went Plant-Based

By Armando Gonzalez
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Armando “Dr. Mondo” Gonzalez could lose the weight but couldn’t keep it off. Last year, he finally found a diet for sustainable weight loss and better health overall.

I am a licensed mental health therapist, motivational speaker, and weight-loss therapist. I have dedicated my career to researching and studying weight loss. Early in my career I had the opportunity to conduct the first research on the psychological impacts of drastic weight loss with former contestants of NBC’s “The Biggest Loser.”

A little over a year ago, despite my thriving practice and emerging national speaking platform, I was struggling with my health. Yet again.

15 Years of Yo-Yoing

My passion for researching and helping people in their weight-loss transformations came from my own lifelong struggles with weight. From the time I was a little boy, food was my source of comfort. I was always overweight—the funny fat kid who could make people laugh.

I went on my first diet when I was a senior in high school, and over the course of the next 15 years, I yo-yoed, losing the same 90 pounds more than six times. I tried countless intense exercise programs and high-protein diets. I could lose the weight; it was keeping it off that was difficult. With each round of drastic weight loss I experienced drastic weight regain.

Eventually I decided to love myself regardless of my weight. The scale no longer held my sense of self-worth hostage. Yet I had given in to the idea that I would always be overweight.

A New Purpose

In September 2017, I weighed around 300 pounds. My wife, Katie, and I had a 1-year-old son, and we had just received news that we were pregnant with our second child, a baby girl. I was elated—but deep down I was overwhelmed. At my size I struggled just to keep up with our 1-year-old son. How would I be able to keep up with two toddlers? I knew I had to get healthy, and the reason was much bigger and better than weight loss. I needed a long-term solution.

I remember watching *Forks Over Knives* when it first came out in 2011. At the time I was heavily indoctrinated into the paleo diet, so the thought of giving up chicken, bacon, and cheese was laughable to me. Yet there was something inside me from the first time I saw the film that spoke to me. Call it intuition; call it the voice within (I call it God): I knew after watching *Forks Over Knives* that I was destined to go plant-based. It just took me almost a decade to fully commit.

I had tried to transition to a plant-based diet a few times before, only to last a couple days and give up. I knew that if I wanted to be successful this time, I couldn’t do it on my own. I did an internet search with the words “plant-based Forks Over Knives coach,” and lo and behold, I found the answer to my prayers, in the form of my coach Sharon.

Sharon saw it as her duty to be honest with me. She told me that at the rate I was going, I would be lucky to walk my daughter down the aisle. And she confronted me with another harsh truth: It’s hard for people to take advice on health and wellness from someone who is unhealthy. As much as it hurt, I needed to hear those things to begin this journey with a different mindset.

For 30 days, as I began my transition to a strict whole-food, plant-based diet, Sharon had me track what I ate and when I ate, but never how much I ate. The first week

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was scary. But it was surprisingly much easier than I thought. I was never hungry. That shocked me. I also felt liberated because I did not have to obsess over numbers or count macronutrients. For the first time in my life, I began getting in touch with my body, eating when I was hungry and until I was full.

Truly Healthy

It didn't take long for the weight to begin falling off. Everyone noticed I was losing weight. They commented on how much healthier I looked, how clear my skin and the whites of my eyes were. After a month, I had bloodwork done, and the results were the best they had ever been in my entire life—even at times when I weighed much less.

I asked for blood panels every 30 days after that. "There's no way changing your diet is going to impact bloodwork in 30-day intervals," my doctor said. Skeptical but willing to humor me, he ordered the labs. Month after month, the results came back with increasingly startling results. I was rapidly reversing all negative trends in my health. I was hardly exercising, intentionally, because I wanted to prove to myself that the plants could do the heavy lifting on their own. And they did.

In six months of eating a whole-food, plant-based diet, my shirt size went from XXL to large, and my pants size went from 40 to 32. I stopped weighing myself years ago because it got me too caught up in the numbers game, so I don't know exactly how much weight I lost, but I estimate between 75 and 90 pounds, easily.

Recently I celebrated one year of eating plant-based. It's given me more energy than I know what to do with. I have a solid daily routine: I go to the local Ethiopian restaurant for a vegan lunch buffet, and I run between 5 and 20 miles. (Over the past three months I've run more than 350 miles!) Weeks ago I completed my 10th half-marathon and set a personal record. This December I will be competing in my first full marathon. I don't run because I have to; I run because I get to. This new body is one that I respect and never take for granted.

I once read these Forks Over Knives [Success Stories](#) night after night, just as you are reading mine now. You may be asking yourself if you have what it takes. The answer is yes. I am not unique: My results are typical. You, too, can rewrite your story.



Ready to get started? Check out [Forks Meal Planner](#), FOK's easy weekly meal-planning tool to keep you on a healthy plant-based path.