



I'm Brooklyn Borough President, and I Reversed My Diabetes with a Plant-Based Diet

By Eric Adams
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After photos by Erica Sherman

After an alarming diabetes diagnosis, Eric Adams, the president of New York City's most populous borough, Brooklyn, turned his health around.

My plant-based journey started in early 2016. I was having vision problems and tingling in my hands and feet, but I did the typical American man thing. From playing football, you learn to suck it up.

Shock, Then Determination

While overseas in Israel, I started having serious pain in my side. After tests, the doctor diagnosed a stomach ulcer, but he was more concerned about the results of my A1C test, which measures average blood sugar. Anything over 6.5 percent is considered diabetes; mine was in the high teens. The doctor said, "I'm surprised you aren't in a coma."

I visited five different doctors here in the city. They all said I needed insulin. They said diabetes is hereditary, that the tingling in my hands and feet signaled permanent nerve damage, that my vision wouldn't improve.

I wanted to try lifestyle changes before signing up for insulin injections. To their credit, two out of five doctors were willing to work with me, though they thought it was a long shot. I Googled "reversing diabetes," and a slew of results came up, including [Forks Over Knives](#) and [Dr. Caldwell Esselstyn](#) at the Cleveland Clinic.

I scheduled an appointment with Dr. Esselstyn, and I watched *Forks Over Knives* several times and took notes. By the time I sat down with Dr. Esselstyn, I had a lot of questions, but my mind was already set on a plant-based path.

I read [The Forks Over Knives Plan](#) and got rid of all the oil, flour, cakes, cookies, and chips. The first seven days I missed sugar and salt. Then I started looking at recipes. I learned how to mix balsamic vinegar with lemon and fry onions without oil.

Within three weeks, my vision cleared up. Within three months, my A1C level dropped to 5.7. The tingling in my hands and feet disappeared, and my blood pressure and cholesterol levels normalized.

Restorative Routines

I never cooked before I made this change, but now I prepare 90 percent of the food I eat. I have a little section in my office where I do my cooking. There is a hot plate and a fridge, and fresh fruits, vegetables, and spices. Sundays are my prep days in the kitchen. I use my Veggie Bullet to chop up enough kale, red cabbage, and onions for the week. I store them in 3-gallon resealable bags so I can pull out whatever I need during the week. I keep a stash at the office, too.

I always had a reasonably active life, but I'm finding more ways to keep my body moving. I have a pull-up bar and small weights in my office. There's also a stand-up desk and a stair stepper so I can get some steps in while I type.

My perspective has really changed. When you sit down to eat a cheese bagel and wash it down with a Pepsi, you walk away feeling depressed and guilty. There is no longer any guilt associated with my meals. It feels good to give my body what it needs.

These days my mind is clearer. My energy level is amazing. This journey has made me think about the connection between mental health and nutrition—how the foods children eat impact learning and behavior. We're pushing to have Meatless Mondays in New York City schools, and we started with 15 schools in my borough.

I've heard this diet described as a very limited diet. But that's not true. The diet I had before was limited. I always ate chicken, fish, or steak with rice. Now I'm exploring fruits, vegetables, and spices I've never tried before. I'm more open to food now.

My Tips for Success

Work It Out. Exercise doesn't require a pass to a local gym. I take the stairs all the time. Sometimes I do

(continued)

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imaginary jump rope for 15 minutes.

You Don't Need an Office Kitchen to Eat

Well. When I spend the day out in the field, I prepare my food the night before, then heat it up and pack it in my thermal bag. Steel-cut oatmeal can stay warm all day. One of my favorite dishes is oatmeal with chopped kale, onions, red cabbage, and spices.

Prep Ahead. Every Sunday I make a base for future meals. I'll simmer things such as eggplant, mushrooms, okra, and onions in a big pot. I freeze the mix in small containers so during the week if I want, say, veggie pasta, I can defrost the base, mix it with my kale and cabbage, and toss it with pasta. I make it easy so time doesn't interfere with having a healthy meal.

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.