



## Reversing Arthritis on a Plant-Based Diet: A Conversation with Iida van der Byl-Knoefel

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When Iida van der Byl-Knoefel developed inflammatory arthritis at the age of 32, she could barely walk down the stairs of her London apartment without feeling pain in her joints. But it wasn't until after she started taking medication—and suffered a severe allergic reaction to it that landed her in the emergency room—that she decided to overhaul her diet by cutting out animal products, sugar, oil, and other inflammatory foods. We chatted with her about going plant-based, fighting her illness, and raising a vegan toddler, which she also chronicles on [Instagram](#) and in her new cookbook, *A Kitchen Fairytale*.

### What inspired you to follow a plant-based lifestyle?

I was convinced that I was doing something to create this condition, so I started researching how to get well naturally. I eventually moved onto the [Paddison Program for Rheumatoid Arthritis](#), where a plant-based diet is at the heart of reversing the symptoms.

### How did switching your diet affect your arthritis symptoms?

On the Paddison Program, I went on an elimination diet so strict that pretty much all my symptoms went away within days. The challenging part was reintroducing foods and seeing which ones I might still react to and then removing them for a while before trying them again. These past three and a half years have been an education in listening to my body and learning how to assess where inflammation occurs and how to address that. It has been an amazing journey, though, and I love the feeling of being powered by plants, with my energy levels shooting through the roof.

### What was the hardest part about changing your eating habits?

I had “food envy” for the first three months. After that, animal foods started feeling like non-foods to me. I went plant-based in 2015, and vegan options back then were rare when eating out. Today, it is quite the opposite: It is unusual for restaurants not to serve at least one vegan dish. The no-oil detail can still be a challenge when eating out, but I am very strict about it, as my body reacts badly to oils. Saying that I am on a “medical diet” tends to get the waiter's attention.

### You're raising your son on a plant-based diet. What has that been like?

It has been such a wonderful experience. Seeing him go for broccoli, sauerkraut, avocado, and potatoes is so rewarding. He has always been tall and a very good weight for his age, so clearly these plants are doing their job. Having to defend this way of life to people who may think our toddler is being deprived of what people see as “delicious foods” is a recurring challenge. However, pretty much everyone who has ever questioned it has eventually come around and incorporated more plants into their own diets or gone plant-based altogether.

### Any favorite kid-friendly meals to prepare?

I love lentil stews, which can be left to do their own thing while I spend time with our little one. My secret ingredient is pineapple—the sweetness tends to be a favorite with children and adults alike. Pancakes are also a staple, and since I make them with bananas and oats, they are filling and super-delicious. It is so lovely to sit down with the whole family and have them with an array of berries, chopped fruit, maple syrup, and nut butters for a special weekend feast. By making an extra batch, we can also enjoy them as a snack, or even breakfast the next morning.

*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.*