



At 45, I'm Healthier and Happier Than I Was in My 20s

By Tatiana Long
September 24 2019

The time gap between the two pictures above is exactly seven years and seven days. In the first picture I was 164 pounds, eating a standard American diet and struggling with generalized anxiety disorder, acne, and vitamin D deficiency. I couldn't walk up a flight of stairs without losing my breath. I had horrible [acid reflux](#) after almost every meal, high levels of [cholesterol](#), acute sinus infections—and the list could go on.

I was very unhappy with the way I felt and looked. Every reflection in every mirror or window and every photo taken was screaming at me, *You've got to do something besides wearing baggy clothes, because that is not helping!*

Although my husband told me every day how much he loved me, I knew he was concerned about my health, too. He often wanted to take me for a hike or go for a run or take our bikes out, and I was not the best company to do outdoor activities with (or any physical activity at all). I wasn't even 40.

At that time I was eating lots of meat and cheese, lots of processed junk, not enough vegetables, and more than enough alcohol and soda.

Just Saying “No” to Processed Foods

Three years later, in March 2015, I decided that enough was enough. It began with my ditching sugar addiction: One day I just said “No” to the beloved lemon cookies that I'd usually eat a box of daily. After 10 days of mental agony while kicking sugar, combined with vigorous cardio at the gym (which at the time consisted of just fast walking on the treadmill), I had a breakthrough and realized that there was so much more I could do.

By a lucky coincidence, around the same time, my friend decided to do something about her health, too. We began sharing recipes for home-cooked plant-based meals and lots of information on food and nutrition.

My husband and I decided to cut out meat and dairy for a few months after watching documentaries such

as *Forks Over Knives*, *What the Health*, and *Eating You Alive*. We figured we'd try it and see how it goes.

I liked the results: I started to lose weight, and my skin started to get better. I continued doing about 80 percent plant-based (still consuming the occasional pizza) for about six months. With my husband's encouragement, I started going to the gym more and actually found myself enjoying it. By the beginning of 2016 I was 100 percent plant-based: no meat or dairy. I was still consuming oil, salt, bread, and occasionally could finish a bottle of wine by myself.

But my anxiety got a bit better, my skin got a little better, and I lost about 25 pounds. My husband and I started going for occasional runs around the block or at the gym. I realized that I was on a path toward a place where I could be happy again.

Fully Committing to a Healthful Plant-Based Diet

At the end of January 2018, the same friend I'd started this journey with helped me go 100 percent whole-food, plant-based, with no added sugar, oil, flour, alcohol, or salt (aka SOFAS free).

I lost another 18 pounds in four months. I've kept that weight off since August 2018; meanwhile, I've continued to [gain muscle](#). I started to run regularly and work out more. My husband is my personal trainer now. My vitamin D level is absolutely perfect, and so are my other lab results. My anxiety is virtually nonexistent. My skin is radiant and looks youthful. I have very low body fat and a good percentage of lean muscle. I haven't been seriously sick in two years (besides maybe a sneeze here or there).

Happier and Healthier Than Ever

So here I am, at the age of 45, healthier and happier than I was in my 20s. In the “After” photo, I'm completing my first 6K trail run, half of which was uphill, under the merciless hot sun. It was not about how fast I could run,

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but about the mere fact of completion. I did it! So can you. So can anybody else. I'm 45 years young, and I am moving forward.

This is not a diet but a lifestyle for me. (And I don't control my portions: I actually eat a lot!)

Whatever excuse you want to give yourself, just think how much happier you could be, how much health you can gain, how much endurance and strength you can obtain. You just have to start with something, even if you think it is small and insignificant. Just start. Start by adding a variety of whole grains, vegetables, fruits, and legumes to your diet. Then try ditching meat, dairy, and junk food. You will never know how good it feels until you feel it for yourself. I'm never going back; I'm only moving forward.

Ready to get started? Check out our [Plant-Based Primer](#) to learn more about adopting a whole-food, plant-based diet.