



At 73, I Went Plant-Based and Said Goodbye to Obesity, Heart Disease, Kidney Disease, and Arthritis

By Rick McKeon
November 25 2019

Rick McKeon shares his journey from obesity, heart disease, and stage 3 kidney disease back to health on a plant-based diet.

Eight years ago, I had a heart attack and triple-bypass open-heart surgery. Even that wasn't enough to scare me into changing my lifestyle permanently. Sure, I made some short-term changes, but after a few months I was right back to my old ways—drinking a 12-pack of beer every day and eating loads of junk food.

I had heart disease, alcoholism, and painful arthritis in my shoulders, in addition to struggling with obesity. I was a sick puppy. I felt like I was standing on the edge of a cliff, about to fall over.



On the Edge

On Nov. 29, 2017, I woke up with my left arm completely numb. The numbness didn't go away. Also, there was a big black spot obscuring part of the visual field in my right eye. I thought that I'd had a stroke. I went directly to the emergency room.

I had dangerously high blood pressure (228/137), an enlarged liver, stage 3 kidney disease, and neuropathy. I told myself that I had some serious health issues and I needed to make some major changes. I hoped it wasn't too late.

Embracing the Effort

Fear and sickness hadn't been enough to motivate me in the past. My secret to success this time around was to get myself excited about making these changes. After several false starts, I found these 12 points to be key:

1. Sobriety: I couldn't follow any health program when I was drinking. I could talk a good story, but I couldn't put it into action. I had to quit drinking.
2. Healthy eating: I adopted a whole-food, plant-based diet.
3. Mild exercise: For me, it is hiking.
4. A positive expectation: I believed from the beginning (without a doubt) that this program would work and I would achieve my goals. I accepted setbacks as part of the learning process.

(continued)

At 73, I Went Plant-Based and Said Goodbye to Obesity, Heart Disease, Kidney Disease, and Arthritis

By Rick McKeon
November 25 2019

5. Educating myself: I learned about nutrition and health by watching documentaries and reading books.
6. Embracing the effort: I had to recognize and embrace the idea that this would take some effort. I learned to view the hard or boring parts as just part of the process.
7. Emotional involvement: Intellect alone doesn't do it. Emotional involvement drives these lessons deep into your being.
8. Stress management: For me, stress management consists of relaxation, visualization, and prayer.
9. Staying away from the edge. If I think about an unhealthy behavior long enough, I'll end up doing it. So, I have to plot a course that keeps me far away from the edge.
10. Learning to treat myself as if I matter: This was a tough lesson for me because feelings of inferiority were part of my personality, but people can change.
11. Gratitude: No matter what your religious beliefs, you probably believe in some kind of Higher Power. I wake up each morning grateful to mine for the opportunity to live another day, and that sets the tone for the entire day.
12. Share your journey: Trying to help others (without being obnoxious or overbearing) is very motivating to me. That's why I wrote this article.

A Greater Purpose

What I thought I could accomplish in six months actually took more than a year. I made some slip-ups, but instead of getting discouraged I always got back on the program right away. It paid off.

By adopting a whole-food, plant-based diet, maintaining sobriety, and exercising moderately, I have been able to:

- Bring my blood pressure down to normal without prescription medications.
- Lose 65 pounds, overcoming obesity.
- Eliminate the neuropathy in my feet and arthritis in my shoulders.
- Start walking again and even do strenuous hikes without any pain in my legs.
- Bring my lab numbers back into the normal range, with no indication of kidney failure.

Also, I discovered a greater purpose for living.

Today I live pain-free and enjoy many activities that I hadn't been able to do for years. My hope is that reading this will inspire you along your own journey. Stories of amazing life-changing recoveries usually come from younger people in their 40s and 50s, but at this writing, I am 75 years old, and I'm telling you: You can do this!

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