



At 56, I'm Fitter, Healthier, and Happier Than Ever, Thanks to a Plant-Based Diet

By Mary Crowson
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I struggled with being overweight my entire adult life. It took chest pains in my mid-40s, spending time in cardiac rehab, being put on [high blood pressure](#) medication, and being labeled as [prediabetic](#) to finally get my attention. I started watching my caloric intake and walking a lot. I lost some weight, but I plateaued and still had a body mass index that put me in the obese category.

Crucial Guidance

I began hanging out with a good friend, Tammy, who appointed herself to become my unpaid coach and accountability partner. She had me send her a photograph of every meal that I was eating. At the time, I really, really liked pizza, ice cream, and a whole host of other processed foods. I don't think Tammy liked what she saw, because she soon asked if she could supply all of my meals and snacks for three weeks. I (rather skeptically) agreed.

For those three weeks, I only ate the food that Tammy provided, which was nothing but [whole-food, plant-based \(WFPB\)](#) meals and snacks. It wasn't that bad, and I started seeing results on the scales. She then convinced me to try eating WFPB for a little while longer.

Cooking is not my favorite pastime, but I was able to find easy yet delicious recipes to prepare. We amassed quite a collection of plant-based cookbooks, including several from Forks Over Knives, and found the quarterly FOK magazine and the recipe app to be particularly useful. Little by little I began to embrace the WFPB

diet.

Running, Cooking, and Thriving

I've been WFPB now for a little over two years, and I have transformed. I no longer need blood pressure medication. I am no longer prediabetic. My BMI is now in the normal range. I've had to get a whole new wardrobe, as I went from wearing size 22 or 24 to wearing size 8 or 10.

Fitness has been a big part of my transformation. I was always a walker, averaging 14,000 steps a day, but since going WFPB I've become a runner. In 2019, I logged over 3,000 miles! I have also started going to the gym four days a week. I keep the repetitions high, especially when working my abdominal muscles.

My cravings for other foods haven't completely gone away, but I have learned to resist those temptations and make better choices. A big part of my success has been my teamwork with other plant-based friends. Three of us began a meal-sharing club. Each of us cooks enough food for a couple meals each week for our group of three. We have set days that we each deliver food, along with any necessary instructions for serving it. Because we are each only cooking once a week, we're able to go above and beyond for every meal, putting forth our best effort.

We have been doing this for almost two years now and we eat so well. [Buddha bowls](#), especially ones with fruit, are a mainstay. We make a week's worth of bowls at a time and package them in sealed containers, complete with homemade fruit-based vinaigrette. I grab one out of the refrigerator and take it wherever I am going for lunch.

Sharing the cooking load definitely has helped keep me on track. It minimizes the temptation to grab take-out food after work. I used to eat out for at least seven meals every week. Now, because I always have healthy prepared food, I eat out a couple times a month, at most.

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Sharing the Lessons

I am the music director at a United Methodist Church and work with all ages, from preschool to senior adults. They always “examine” the food I bring to church dinners, and now they know all about tempeh, tofu, farro, and quinoa. I have shared WFPB recipes and meals with them. They eagerly update me about their weight-loss successes, and it makes me so happy to be part of their journey.

I feel amazing and recently completed a 50K (31-mile) race and hiked the Grand Canyon. I just turned 56 years young and am in the best shape of my life. I am planning a hiking trip to Banff this summer, and that is only the first of many more active vacations that I'll be taking. The best is yet to come!

My Keys to Plant-Based Success

1. Adopting the whole-food, plant-based way of eating.
2. Meal-sharing with fellow WFPB eaters.
3. Reminding myself that I am not dieting but am making a lifestyle change.
4. Using chopsticks when possible. (It slows down my eating.)
5. Limiting how often I eat out.
6. Bringing home-prepared food with me to functions.
7. Rewarding goal achievements with non-food items (e.g., running shoes).
8. Enlisting the help of a friend/coach. Teamwork really does make the dream work!

Editor's Note: This Success Story was co-authored by Tammy Than, Mary's coach and friend.