



As a Radiation Oncologist Suffering from IBD, Discovering Plant-Based Nutrition Has Changed My Life

By Isabelle Vallières M.D.
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I grew up eating an omnivorous diet with a lot of [dairy products](#). I drank a few glasses of milk a day, “for strong bones.” I also regularly ate chicken, fish, and a little bit of red meat. I continued eating that way when I left the family house to live on my own. Later, when I got pregnant with my son, I made sure to add lots of fruits and vegetables to my diet, but I kept eating plenty of meat and dairy, too.

In 2005, a few weeks after giving birth to my son, I was diagnosed with ulcerative colitis, a form of [inflammatory bowel disease \(IBD\)](#). It was a challenging time, becoming a new mother and suffering from painful symptoms. I was exhausted.

On a Mission to Find Answers

I’m a radiation oncologist, and patients often ask me what lifestyle changes they can make to improve cancer outcomes and quality of life. Four years ago, on a quest to find answers for them, I was researching complementary therapies and came across *The China Study*, by [T. Colin Campbell, Ph.D.](#) After that, I read articles and listened to [podcasts about plant-based diets](#). I could not believe all the evidence connecting plant-

based nutrition with better quality of life, better [cancer](#) outcomes, and decreased risk of [multiple diseases](#). I was sold: I switched my diet overnight and convinced my husband to join me. I also enrolled in the plant-based nutrition certificate program through eCornell.

Full of Energy, Free of IBD Symptoms

It’s been four years since my plant-based awakening. I’ve never looked back—honestly, the hardest part of this lifestyle change has been to forgive myself for not doing it sooner. Since changing my diet, I’ve not suffered a significant recurrence of ulcerative colitis; I am completely asymptomatic. I wonder sometimes if I might be cured. My [skin](#) is better, too. I used to suffer from rosacea, but I’ve had no episodes since changing my diet. I am very active physically: I run, cycle, spin, do yoga, walk, and hike. I feel so energized.

My husband has stuck with this lifestyle and is feeling good, as well. We eat overnight oats every morning. I love to make bowls with sweet potatoes, tofu, and spicy peanut sauce. He makes a great [vegan chili](#) that we serve with avocados—delicious! We enjoy snacking on baked kale chips; crispy chickpeas; and hummus with carrots and celery. I love apples, too. I don’t miss any of the foods I used to eat.

Encouraging Others to Eat More Plants

In the beginning, I found it hard to have to explain our diet to our extended family, and going out to eat was a challenge. We have now found many restaurants with excellent options, and our family is more open and understanding. Our niece even adopted a plant-based diet after spending a few weeks with us!

On top of transforming my health, this lifestyle has completely changed my approach with patients. I discuss nutrition with each of them and encourage them to

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introduce more plants into their diets and, ideally, to adopt a completely plant-based diet. I find they're more receptive than you might expect.

I am so happy about my decision to go plant-based. I feel very good.

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. To learn more about a whole-food, plant-based diet, visit our [Plant-Based Primer](#).