

One Woman's Journey Blossoms into Support for Thousands

by Elisha Exon

Never in a million years did I imagine the plant-based community we would have today on Facebook. With 65,000 members of the Eat to Live Support Group and over 30,000 followers of the Eat to Live Daily page, I've had the incredible opportunity to work with thousands of individuals who've changed their lives by adopting a whole-food, plant-based diet. Some stumbled upon our community simply through Facebook, others sought us out after reading Dr. Fuhrman's best-selling books. Just within our community we've witnessed thousands of lives change firsthand through one simple formula: eat plants and eliminate junk food. We've watched as diabetes symptoms have disappeared, heart disease has reversed, blood pressure has lowered, autoimmune symptoms have diminished, and among so many other things, weight has been lost. So much weight loss! It's clear to me that thousands of people are alive today thanks to this lifestyle and the teachings of physicians such as Dr. Fuhrman.

Since our community blossomed, I've been asked countless times about my own health journey and what prompted the development of this community. I'd love to share that story with you now.

My struggle with weight and body image began in early childhood. My first diet was at 11 years old; I was 5'3" and weighed 110 pounds, but I was sure that wasn't thin enough. I spent the entirety of my young adult life in a cycle of eating disorders—long periods of starvation and purging when I could no longer starve.

The dangers of my eating disorders didn't fully occur

to me until I got married. I realized that it would not work as I started my own family. So before I got hitched, I stopped the blatant eating disorder behaviors, but only to transition into the more socially acceptable version of disordered eating: diets. That diet mentality ruled my life for over a decade. Every few months it was something new. Sometimes I was eating the cheese off the top of my pizza to adhere to the Atkins program, other times I was fitting ice cream into the two-hour daily eating window I'd allotted myself. Date nights with my husband were determined by the diet of the week. And although I was never morbidly obese, I was steadily gaining weight—thanks to my diets. I would lose a little and gain a little more on a slow but steady, upward trend. I was captive to the cycle.

In 2010, my third child was born and frankly, I was tired of struggling with the question

I'd always faced: which diet next? Would it be Weight Watchers or calorie-counting or carb cycling...or maybe a new one? But this time around, something was different. I

had started a "mommy blog" called Motivated Mamas. It was a place to write about my favorite products, habits, and you guessed it: dieting. Since I was on a mission to lose the 20 pounds from pregnancy, I invited a handful of friends to join me in a 12-week weight-loss challenge. The participants would choose their own program and journal their progress each week in a blog post.

One of the women chose the program from *Eat to Live*, by Dr. Joel Fuhrman. I was intrigued as I read her

weekly updates. Not only was she losing weight quickly, the food she was eating looked incredible. I'd always imagined that a vegan lifestyle would be restrictive, but the



Elisha Exon before and after adopting a plant-based lifestyle

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recipes she was posting had me running to the store for ingredients. The chana dal soup she shared with me was my first clue that this was indeed a lifestyle for foodies like me. Packed with lentils, onions, potatoes, and Indian seasoning, I was in heaven. I decided to give this lifestyle a try. My friend gave me a list of items to shop for to get me started and encouraged me to read the book as soon as possible. I read *Eat*



Elisha Exon reaches out to others with her Eat to Live Support Group (Facebook) and www.eattolivedaily.com.

to Live like it was a novel, cover-to-cover, late into the night. I felt invigorated like never before. Everything Dr. Fuhrman wrote made perfect sense to me. It opened my eyes and made me realize why I was always hungry, why I was tired, and why every other diet led to a never-ending cycle of more diets. I knew this was my answer. I would never *diet* again.

In the following three months, I lost my baby weight by applying Dr. Fuhrman's simple Nutritarian formula: two pounds of vegetables a day, whole grains, lots of fresh fruits, beans and lentils, and whole-food, plant-based fats such as avocado, nuts, and seeds. Because I was breastfeeding, I didn't follow the portion suggestions as closely as they're written in the program, but that didn't matter. I had more energy than ever before, and I was losing weight.

At that time, I became aware of Facebook's group feature—a new way to connect people with similar interests through social media. That's when the Eat to Live Support Group was born. I needed to meet people (or even recruit people) to do this with me. I had no idea that one day it would blossom into one of the best communities on Facebook. Today, it's a place where newbies can learn about the intricacies of the lifestyle, how to face obstacles related to food within our families and communities, how to cook, and favorite recipes. And, of course, it's a platform where success stories are welcomed and celebrated.

What I've learned is that there are two parts to making

with the support of a community can make all the difference; I know it has in mine.

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The whole-food, plant-based lifestyle has deeply impacted my life journey. I'm grateful for Dr. Fuhrman and his continued efforts in making this information so simple and readily available and for the National Health Association for pulling together the expertise of dozens of physicians to help perpetuate this great movement. Plant-based nutrition is gaining momentum, and the timing couldn't be better. With heart disease the number one killer in the world and obesity leading to more preventable disease than any other factor, this information is critical. Mark and Wanda Huberman of the NHA are pushing this effort along through social media and through their incredible live conferences. It's such a treat to participate in the NHA conference in Cleveland,

hearing from a powerhouse panel of the world's greatest plant-based nutrition experts.

My advice to newbies is to seek out resources. They are everywhere: live conferences, YouTube, support groups on Facebook, magazines, online summits, and documentaries. The resources to help you live this way are abundant. There is no reason to continue living with symptoms from preventable disease. Come join us and live the best whole-food, plant-based life possible!



this journey sustainable: the food formula and the support. While some are able to live this way on their own, most of us need the accountability and support of a loving community. It's become my mission to provide just that. The road isn't without bumps and obstacles. It's often like learning to play an instrument, with mistakes and plateaus and growth. Learning to do this