

Fully Recovered from Five Autoimmune Diseases

The “Medical Miracle” of Committing to a Nutrient-Dense Diet

by Jodi O’Neill

I’ve been a member of the National Health Association for almost 30 years, including 10 years in the Century Club and now a Life Member. And because of the NHA, I found Joel Fuhrman, M.D., who helped me recover from five autoimmune diseases: psoriasis, rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, Hashimoto’s thyroiditis, and Sjogren’s syndrome.

As of this writing, I am 70 years old, and feel younger, healthier, and all-around better than I did for most of my 30s, 40s, and early 50s. I am forever grateful to the NHA and Dr. Fuhrman for my recovery. I continue to follow their principles and teachings to maintain my good health as I age.

Medical History

I started experiencing skin rashes and joint pain as a teenager. The itchiness was constant, and my joints were so stiff and painful I was unable to bend my elbows or stand on my feet for very long. My pediatrician and an allergist prescribed steroids and antihistamines, which caused weight gain, dry mouth, and debilitating fatigue. I took these drugs for almost 20 years, unable to reduce or eliminate them without a recurrence of the skin rash and joint pain.

In my late 30s, I was assigned to work in France for two years, which turned out to be life-changing in many ways. I loved working in a foreign country and, in fact, met my husband there! But I found I was unable to buy the convenience foods I had been living on—diet sodas, sugary cereals, frozen dinners, etc. (Unfortunately, today these items are easily available throughout Europe.)

So, I lived like the French, eating foods fresh and in season, shopping daily at the farmer’s market, cooking from scratch. I soon realized I needed less medication, and by the time I left France, I was drug-free with clear skin and painless joints.

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my health could be affected by what I ate and how I lived my life. Could it be that certain foods are health-inducing and others actually cause illness? With this revelation I began a health education journey that continues to this day.

Road to Nutritarian Recovery

On my return to the U.S. I wanted to maintain my new-found level of health. I eliminated all junk food and artificial ingredients and started cooking for myself.

I discovered the NHA, which was called the American Natural Hygiene Society (ANHS) at the time. I joined in 1991 and subsequently read an article in *Health Science* by Joel Fuhrman, M.D., in which he mentioned high-nutrient eating as a path to relief for autoimmune and other health issues. I then sought out and read everything I could find that he had written. I also bought many recordings from the ANHS conferences.

I soon realized the extent of the dietary changes that Dr. Fuhrman was recommending. I envisioned what he would say to me: if I wanted to be well again without the harmful side effects of medication, I had to make a full commitment for the rest of my life. Was I willing to do this? Could I do this? How would I manage being the only one in my family and among my friends eating in this new way? What about travel? Social events?

I was living a frantic, restaurant-hopping, stressed-out life in Manhattan and soon lapsed into old habits. By the time I turned 50 in 1999, now living in North Carolina, the skin rash had returned. I was diagnosed not only with psoriatic arthritis, but also lupus, Hashimoto’s (an autoimmune condition that attacks the thyroid), and Sjogren’s, which affects tears and saliva, where I was no longer able to wear contact lenses or swallow without feeling like I had a mouth full of sand.

I had debilitating fatigue and brain fog. In our home, I climbed upstairs on all fours. My muscles ached so much it was hard to lift my arms to wash my hair in the shower. Open lesions of psoriasis covered my body, which caused women in my water aerobics class to move away from me. I



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was itchy everywhere: arms, legs, torso, scalp, eyelids, and in places I could not reach—inside my ears, vaginally, rectally.

Doctors were eager to prescribe Plaquinil, methotrexate, Enbrel, and /or the steroids and antihistamines of my younger days. I refused all drugs. In France, I had learned the connection between health and lifestyle, and now, in 2000, I was finally ready to seriously commit to it.

I called Dr. Fuhrman the next morning and told him, “Misery is my motivation! Please help me.” I flew up to New Jersey to see Dr. Fuhrman. He ordered laboratory tests and supervised me in a detoxing, water-only fast. I learned the science of nutritional excellence. Dr. Fuhrman’s book, *Eat to Live*, was still in manuscript form, which he loaned to me. Over the next two days, I read it, including his handwritten notes in the margins, and I remember hand-copying all the recipes to take back home with me.

From listening to my NHA recordings again, reading Health Science articles, and through discussions with Dr. Fuhrman, his wife Lisa, and other patients I met in his office, I learned the science and philosophy of the healing process. The human body is designed to heal itself; cells can regenerate and rejuvenate if properly nourished and cared for. The NHA teaches “health care is self care.” When Americans eat highly processed, high-calorie, nutrient-poor “food;” if they don’t get adequate rest and exercise; and/or if they smoke, then over time, they are likely to develop chronic diseases that lead to a lower quality of life and to the bulk of U.S. health-care expenditures.

Healing with Benefits

Most diets focus on calories and juggle the good vs. bad of protein, fat, and carbohydrates. By contrast, a true healing, antiinflammatory, immune-boosting, weight-loss solution requires focusing on the nutrients in foods. So, I began eating large salads containing a variety of leafy greens, raw vegetables, and legumes. I made creamy nut-based salad dressings and hearty vegetable bean or lentil soups. My meals included raw and cooked cruciferous vegetables, cooked greens, and fresh fruit. To combat the inflammation of autoimmune issues, I added green juices and minimized flour products, even if whole-grain or gluten-free.

It took about a year for all my symptoms, including the psoriatic skin lesions, to disappear. That was 20 years ago. The longer I follow Dr. Fuhrman’s nutrient-dense way of eating, the more it has become my chosen lifestyle.



Jodi’s back before and after adopting a Nutritarian lifestyle.

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seasonal allergies—gone. Improved bone density. No gastrointestinal or gynecological problems. Healthy gums and minimal plaque. At age 70, I wake up in the morning and nothing hurts—no joint pain, no stiffness, no arthritis. My skin is clear of psoriasis. The only drug I take is for thyroid function, which unfortunately did not fully regenerate.

Lessons Learned

The reasons I stick with this are not because I have great willpower or because my family and many friends are like-minded and join me in what I am doing. My motivation comes from the simple fact that I feel so good eating this way. I think more clearly, focus better, and have more energy and better digestion.

People often tell me that they don’t have the time to prepare fresh foods or to cook meals from scratch. My reaction is that no one has more than 24 hours a day, and how we spend those hours tells us our priorities. During a health crisis, nothing becomes a higher priority than recovery. I view the time I devote to preparing and eating all natural, whole foods as an investment today to avoid spending time in doctors’ offices and hospitals tomorrow.

Today, at 70, I feel half my age, and I am grateful for my recovery. I want to share my story with the hope of reaching others who may be suffering as I was and to convey the possibilities of an ideal weight, vitality, and recovery from chronic or life-threatening disease.

I once called my personal health transformation a “medical miracle,” but I no longer believe this. Rather, I’ve merely seen proof of what Dr. Fuhrman calls the body’s remarkable regenerative power as a self-healing machine. NHA teaches that health is a natural state if we choose to give the body proper nutrients and care. Therefore, health is a choice. I choose health. 

