

My Journey into the Whole-food, Plant-based World

How my husband and I found healthy eating, weight loss, and improved health.

by Ellie Dixon (with J. Lanning Smith)

It was the spring of 2013, and a friend of mine was starting a “no-meat, no-dairy, no-oil” club in our Sun City Hilton Head active adult community. She insisted that if I tried this plant-based way of eating I’d see changes in just three days. I thought, “Oh really!”

I was skeptical yet curious. I agreed to try it, thinking that I’d call her bluff soon enough. However, to my surprise, after just three days of eating this new diet, I realized my digestion had improved. I was also becoming very creative with making new, healthy meals. It was actually becoming fun—who knew?

My husband began by calling my new eating plan “extreme,” but a couple weeks later he came around after giving the diet a try; he wanted to see if giving up dairy foods would really improve his painful arthritis. It did and he became a believer! The last time he changed his diet was in the late nineties when he had embraced

the Atkins Diet and thought it was cool that he could have all the meat and hamburgers he liked as long as he didn’t eat the bun. He lost about 20 pounds back then but found no additional health benefits, and soon saw that his weight loss was short-lived.

Even though I was excited and learning a lot about this plant-based world, I still had my reservations. I purposely scheduled my annual physical after my 21-day plant-based

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“experiment” so my doctor could tell me if going without animal protein had harmed me. At the time, I knew little about the science around food. While I tried to ignore the naysayers, I was silently wondering if this new way of eating might be hurting me, even though I couldn’t recall feeling this good in years. It turned out that I was 10 pounds lighter, and my cholesterol and blood pressure numbers were down. At the time, I was on medication for both. My doctor cut my pills in half, then asked me to get my bloodwork



The amazing Ellie Dixon!

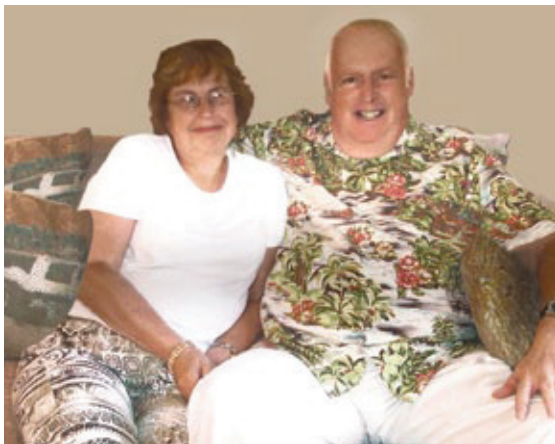
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checked in six months, at which time he took me off all my meds. What a nice feeling.

Moving Forward

I bought many plant-based cookbooks and enjoyed bringing dishes to potlucks and other events. While we relished our new and different meals, we both continued to lose weight. We also found a need to buy new clothes that fit us better; a pleasant discovery.

In addition, we opted to include a ritual we had when we were working (we are now retired). Every weekend, I’d make an international dish that would follow some winding-down time that we’d accompany with some music and a glass of wine. We started out with an Indian meal. Over the past five years, we have marked the Chinese New Year with an Asian meal, Thanksgiving with a delicious pumpkin pie after a delightful veggie dinner, and the Fourth of July with wheat



In 2006 (above), I weighed 152 pounds and Bob 260. Today I weigh 118 and Bob 170!

gluten and pinto bean-based hot dogs that tasted much like what we once enjoyed. We were even able to replicate the traditional Jewish dishes that we had enjoyed for years.

I sometimes forget that when we retired about 12 years ago, I looked forward to less meal preparation and a lot of quick pick-up meals, or evenings at area restaurants. Once we got involved with the Eat Smart, Live Longer Club that my friend and her sisters had started, it became an exciting challenge to try the wide array of recipes that were available from Forks Over Knives, Happy Herbivore, and more.

Before I knew it, I added an Instant Pot to our kitchen and even took a class on how to use it. Once I made friends with this new and different appliance (which was six months after I bought it), it became the cooker for our daily oatmeal from then on. I learned to mix in a little turmeric powder (a Dr. Michael Greger suggestion), a handful of raisins, and a tad of vanilla. Then in one of the good doctor's videos, he touted the benefits of a few ground cloves and the importance of berries on top. When I took the eCornell nutrition course recently, one of the dietitians noted that she likes to add pure, natural and freshly ground peanut butter to her oatmeal. We now do too. Truly, we believe we are eating a healthful, gourmet delight every morning, not to mention the tablespoon of ground flax seeds that get mixed into each bowl. Currently, I'm looking for an interesting way to incorporate greens with our daily "super oatmeal."

Little by little I found myself making more recipes: a variety of hummus recipes, Mary McDougall's "sour cream," my own plant-based mayo, and more. We became devotees of Happy Herbivore's recipe for Portobello Steak, the PlantPure Nation's recipe for Reuben Casserole, Rip Esselstyn's Bad 2 the Bone Chili, and the Artichoke Paella in Dr. McDou-



Ellie shares encouraging words with "Eat Smart, Live Longer Club" in Sun City Hilton Head, South Carolina.

gall's *Starch Solution*. At Mary McDougall's suggestion, I bought a Scan Pan and am so glad I did. I use it to sauté veggies, make pancakes, and heat up soy curls. It's the pan that really convinced me that there is no need for oil in our current lifestyle.

Clearing our pantry of all the "Standard American Diet" (SAD) foods was easier than we had imagined. Reading labels was something I always thought I did well, but after watching a video by registered dieti-

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tian Jeff Novick and going on some grocery store tours with my club, I learned that there was much more to it. Admittedly, I had a lot to learn.

It's now been five years since we started our whole-food, plant-based lifestyle, and I believe we are using our resources well. Dr. Doug Lisle and Dr. Alan Goldhamer's book, *The Plea-*

sure Trap, helped us deal with social pressures, and Dr. Greger's *How Not to Die* book taught us so much we never knew, especially to be more aware of the Daily Dozen (the 12 foods you should be eating every day). I continue to be active in the Eat Smart, Live Longer Club. My friend and I co-teach a 21-Day Kickstart program that has helped well over 100 residents here.

When my husband and I look back to May 5, 2013, I remember being 37 pounds heavier and uncomfortable with my medication. Bob, at 6-foot-3-inches tall, was 260 pounds when he started to change his diet. He much more prefers his current weight of 173 pounds (and is medicine free). We both relish the varied and delicious meals we have each day and all that we continue to learn about plant-based, whole foods. We sometimes recall the many diets we had deemed trendy, some of which we tried, like the Scarsdale Diet and a grapefruit/steak combo regime, along with the Atkins program, and wonder why we didn't discover whole-food, plant-based eating earlier. Who knew it would be such a great way to go!

