

Finding Her Own Answers

Determination, research, and a willingness to change results in a better life.

by Tami Kramer

My plant-based journey began in 2012 after a yearly physical, when my physician advised me that if the upward trend of my LDL cholesterol continued, he would have to put me on a statin drug. I expressed my concerns about taking the medication, whereby he informed me that it was simply genetics. In his opinion, I was already doing everything right—exercising, watching my weight, and eating a balanced standard American diet. “Imagine if you weren’t already doing these things,” he said. I left feeling a bit confused but determined to show him I would not be going on a statin. I didn’t know yet what I needed to do, but I was committed to figuring it out.

I have a family medical history of heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, obesity, and Alzheimer’s. Being in my mid-50s at that time, I’d already been growing more concerned with my overall health. I had started cleaning up my diet and eliminating processed foods. Looking towards the future, I wanted to prevent whatever diseases I could, and I also wanted to get to a healthy weight and stay there. Dieting had become a way of life for me. I could lose weight, but maintaining the weight loss eluded me.

I started doing some online research and read about a whole food, plant-based diet. As luck would have it, I happened to see Dr. Fuhrman on a PBS special talking all about his *Eat to Live* program. I was intrigued by the information he was sharing and bought his book. At the time, though, we were in the middle of planning our daughter’s wedding, so I set aside the notion of making such a big dietary change dur-

ing that exciting but hectic time in our lives and instead planned on revisiting the idea post-wedding.

In 2013, I read *Eat to Live* again and started watching some YouTube videos and documentaries about a plant-based lifestyle. The *Forks Over Knives* documentary was a big wake-up call. After watching it, I knew I had to adopt a whole food, plant-exclusive diet. When I learned about the correlation between diet and cancer, I also knew this was the best lifestyle choice for my husband, whose family medical history includes a variety of deadly cancers.

Armed with all this new, exciting information, I mustered up the courage to sit my meat-loving husband down and tell him what I wanted to do. He had always lovingly supported my weight loss and other healthy choices, and this time was no different. He did, however, request that I not push him into a corner by

insisting that he also give up animal products. He was happy to eat whatever I fixed at home, but he still wanted the freedom to choose what he ate away from home. It was a good compromise. Before long, though, he discovered that he felt so much better when he ate fully plant-based that he also chose to give up animal products altogether.

I will be the first to admit that, in the beginning, I had difficulty wrapping my head around what our plant-based meals were going to look like. But from the start, everything I made was delicious, satisfying, and filling. Our family and friends also loved the

new plant-based dishes we were sharing with them.

About a year after adopting this new lifestyle, I started having some unusual symptoms: difficulty sleeping, hair



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loss, lack of energy, dry skin, and even some abdominal weight gain. I hadn't changed anything about my food or exercise, so I was shocked at what was happening. My doctor ordered some tests and we discovered that I had hypothyroidism. (I am pretty sure my thyroid was malfunctioning prior to going plant-based, as I had had some similar, but less dramatic, symptoms the year before. But my test results at that time had come back within the normal range.) Once I started taking thyroid medication, my symptoms went away, and I felt normal again. However, the extra pounds I'd gained when my thyroid stopped functioning properly would not budge.

It was around this time that I learned about an online program that Chef AJ and John Pierre had created to help people get healthy and achieve a permanent healthy weight. I signed up and began the program in February of 2015. The basic nutrition principles I was taught were modeled after those at TrueNorth Health Center: eat an exclusively whole-plant-food diet, free of salt, oil, sugar, flour, and alcohol.

That was a turning point for me. For the first time, I was introduced to the concept of calorie density, which is a measure of the calorie content of food relative to its weight or volume. This nutritional approach promotes choosing foods with fewer than 600 calories per pound,

such as fruits, vegetables, and unrefined complex carbohydrates like potatoes, grains, and legumes. The idea is that when you eat the foods that are lower in calorie density and higher in water and fiber, your body will feel satisfied even while you are losing weight. These whole foods also happen to be the most nutrient-dense and health-promoting.

I also read *The Pleasure Trap* by Dr. Doug Lisle and Dr. Alan Goldhamer. It explained why I had been a chronic dieter; I was continually getting caught in the pleasure trap! Before reading their book, I thought I was emo-



Once barely able to walk a mile, Tami now enjoys extended hikes in beautiful natural areas.

tionally broken because I was unable to lose weight and keep it off. Now I realize that I was trying to eat food-like substances that hijacked my brain and were never intended by the food industry to be eaten in moderation. These processed foods are engineered to be addictive to promote repeat sales, without any regard for consumers' well-being.

It was with this fine-tuning of my plant-based approach that I was finally able to lose the extra

weight and keep it off. I weigh 49 pounds less today than I did at my highest weight. I was a size 16 at my heaviest weight and now have maintained at a size 4 for the past 6 years! I still follow the principles of calorie density to maintain my healthy weight, and I love the food I eat.

We have experienced many benefits from our lifestyle choices. My husband, Tom, and I saw significant changes in our LDL cholesterol within those first months and continued improvement over time. The osteoarthritis in my knees subsided, the weekly headaches went away, and my cravings were gone. I had a colonoscopy in 2013 and had six benign polyps removed. After adopting my new lifestyle, I had another colonoscopy and had zero polyps. Tom used to suffer from migraines, knee pain, and back pain, and all are now nonexistent. I can also say that I have an overall sense of peace and calmness about me. It's wonderful to know we are making choices that help the environment, cause no harm to animals, and keep us healthy.

At my heaviest I could only go for about a 20-minute walk on level ground without feeling winded. Now I can hike 16 miles in the Sierra foothills in one day! I love the challenge of hiking and am grateful that our new lifestyle allows us to be physically fit so we are able to enjoy the wonders of nature. We have three young grandchildren, and we can keep up with them and be the fun grandparents they deserve. We want to live our lives fully and not watch from the sidelines.

In addition, our lifestyle changes have had a ripple effect. Our adult children and our grandchildren have all joined in following a whole food, plant-based lifestyle, and everyone is thriving!

In our effort to help pass forward the many benefits of this approach, my husband and I share recipes, health tips, interviews, and more on our Nutmeg Notebook blog, You-

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Tami and her husband, Tom

Tube channel, Instagram, and Facebook. We are passionate about helping people transition easily so that they, too, can reap the advantages of a plant-powered lifestyle. We teach people to get healthy and stay healthy, one meal at a time.

While attending Chef AJ's Ultimate Weight Loss conference in Las Vegas in 2019, we were fortunate to meet Mark and Wanda Huberman. We had a wonderful chat with them and felt like we were old friends. We learned then about the National Health Association and *Health Science*, and we signed up right away to get the magazine. We love reading the science-based

articles, the testimonials, and the recipes.

We later decided to become Century Club members to further support the amazing work the NHA is doing. We have also gifted memberships to our family members. We believe that it does take a grass-roots effort to get the important information out to the masses about the many benefits of our plant-centered lifestyle choices. We feel a responsibility to help pass the information forward and to help those who are already providing educational opportunities, like the NHA.

We are looking forward to attending the next NHA conference and hopefully meeting many of you there!



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along with a research staff composed of two PhDs and one MD who are doing primary research. We're also affiliating with the Mayo Clinic, the Buck Institute, Texas A&M, and other research facilities around the world. We have launched the *fasting.org* website, which is a fasting compendium site where all the research on fasting is made freely available to the public. It is important to note that all proceeds from the TrueNorth Health Center flow to the TrueNorth Health Foundation; that is currently the principal source of our funding. So when people come to the center, they are also supporting our research. We're also starting to qualify for research grants, which is very exciting.

How much research have you done, and what impact has it had in generating interest in your work at the center?

We have been very prolific and hugely successful at publishing a dozen articles, studies, and case reports that have appeared in peer-reviewed journals. We're conducting two studies right now, one with the Mayo Clinic on body composition and one that's a phase-one clinical trial for the treatment of high blood pressure with fasting. These papers are currently in review. We expect that they will be coming out next year, and when they do, hopefully they should make fasting treatment even more acceptable.

Interest in our work has increased. We've been in a number of movies, including *What the Health*, along with a sequel that is in the works. I was also invited to appear on an episode of NBC's "The Doctors" and have been asked to speak to medical schools and at seminars all over the country about fasting and diet. All this is driven by the TrueNorth Health Foundation's Public Speakers Bureau. Finally, I recently appeared on a Rich Roll podcast, which now has over 1.5 million views and has given us tremendous positive publicity.



With over 1.5 million views, Dr. Goldhamer's appearance on the Rich Roll podcast continues to spread the word about TrueNorth's work.

Any new books on the horizon?

Dr. Toshia Myers, the director of the TrueNorth Health Foundation, and I are finishing a book called *Can Fasting Save Your Life?* We expect it to be completed in the summer, and we're very excited about it. Our goal is to bring together all this important information on fasting in a new, modern book.

But fasting *can* save your life, just as Doctor Shelton pronounced back in 1964; you demonstrate that every day.

Yes—it can, and it does.

Finally, I know that you and Jennifer have been Life Members of the NHA for as long as I can remember, and I wanted to ask why you continue to support the NHA, serve on the board, speak at our conferences, and write for *Health Science*.

We do so because the National Health Association is the one organization in the world that fully embraces the importance of health resulting from healthful living and the use of fasting as a healthful tool. They've also been singularly responsible for spearheading this entire natural hygiene movement, which has provided the foundation for everything that we do. I have the strongest fondness for the NHA. I've been involved with it since I've been a kid and plan to continue to be involved for as long as I'm alive.

