

probably had every child's dream—access to all the pizza, candy bars, and root beer floats I could handle. My parents owned and operated a "lounge" where dad tended bar and mom made the best Italian pizza—all from scratch—in her tiny pizza kitchen with a large double oven. She'd roll out a child-sized crust and allow me to add my own sauce and toppings. I typically chose shredded mozzarella and homemade sausage, and while it was baking to crispy perfection, I'd stroll over to the bar to make myself to a foamy root beer float in a frosted beer mug. Then I'd grab a candy bar off the rack as I passed by.

Most meals at home were comprised of some type of meat prepared in a skillet and always cooked in butter. Malted milk shakes, hot dogs, and cotto salami sandwiches were common. Fortunately, my parents were avid gardeners as well, so we did enjoy fresh produce regularly. My memories aren't intended to reflect poorly on my folks in any way. They were loving, caring parents doing only what they knew best to do at that time.

As you may have guessed, my family's medical history is as dire as those high-fat foods we normally ate. Heart disease, stroke, diabetes, cancer, dementia, and many inflammatory issues were typical. There I was in my mid-30s, consuming cheesy deep-dish pizzas, the weekly fish fry at the VFW, and banana split blizzards at the Dairy Queen. My cholesterol was over 200, I was diagnosed with osteopenia, and I had constant winter colds.

Then in the late 80s, vegetarian friends invited us over for dinner and explained that they had eliminated meat because they were animal lovers. We looked into that a little deeper and also decided to stop eating meat, but we still consumed dairy, eggs, and junk food like Tombstone frozen pizzas and Hostess cupcakes.

Several years later, I belonged to a business-women's organization that invited a speaker named Arlene to give a presentation at our meeting. Arlene was an instructor for Wellness Forum Health based in Ohio, and she told us about a four-week class she was offering which supported plant-based eating. I thought I was already eating healthily because I had cut out the meat (though now, of course, I realize that I was totally ignorant and apparently delusional). But I decided to attend Arlene's class as something fun to do with my girlfriends and to confirm what I was already doing.

That's when the lights came on. Arlene's class opened my eyes not only to what constitutes a healthy diet, but also to the health ramifications associated with *not* eating a healthy diet. I was like most people who believe that fruits and veggies are good for them but fail to realize just how damaging other foods can be.

So, my journey began by switching from an unhealthy vegetarian diet to an unhealthy vegan diet and, eventually, as my knowledge base grew, to a whole-food, plant-based diet with no added oils. Overall, I've been plant-based in some form or fashion for over 32 years, but I've been *healthily* whole-food, plant-based for the last 15 years.

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Early in that transition period, I followed Arlene's footsteps and also became a certified health educator for Wellness Forum Health, a role I served in for many years. From there I pursued training through other venues, such as the Center for Nutrition Studies, The Starch Solution, and other courses. I was also fortunate to have the opportunity to complete CHIP training. Initially, I offered classes at my home, at school districts, and at a hospital's fitness center. And my column, "The Nutrition Coach," which typically featured a health article or a Q&A format, ran in our local newspapers for many years as well.

Then about ten years ago, I was led to do something I had *no* intention or desire to do... write a book. That idea had never been on my radar. But having been a women's Bible study facilitator for several years, I began to notice how today's evidence-based dietary research actually correlates with the principles of scripture. One night in 2013, I felt strongly led to record those observations in a book. In fact, my mind was flooded with ideas so fast that I struggled to write them down. That led to the writing and publication of *The "Plan A" Diet: Combining Whole-Food, Plant-Based Nutrition with the Timeless Wisdom of Scripture*, which released in 2019 and earned a 2020 Book Excellence Award.



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Today I continue to offer classes both locally and online, including a transition course with optional personal coaching. I also host a monthly inflammation support group for Plant Based Nutrition Support Group (PBNSG.org) and volunteer as an event moderator for their featured speakers. Other things that keep me hopping are speaking at local groups and veg fests, participating in online summits, and producing a weekly newsletter.

It's truly an honor to be featured in *Health Science* magazine. It's always been my goal to teach, encourage, and equip people to take an active role in their health; that's why the NHA's mission "to educate and empower individuals to understand that health results from healthful living" resonates with me deeply. Educating and empowering people is the key factor in their success. I think back to Arlene's class and wonder where I'd be today had I not stumbled across that credible information.

I proudly support the work of the NHA because they're a wonderful resource for both the newcomers to this lifestyle and for us seasoned veterans. I appreciate how they accomplish their mission using a wide variety of communication tools, too: the quarterly magazine, top-notch conferences, the podcasts, recipes from renowned chefs, plant-based travel opportunities, and more. All of that takes a LOT of time, dedication, and hard work!

As our alarming health statistics continue to persist, organizations such as the NHA that promote the benefits and skills needed to adopt a plant-based lifestyle are absolutely crucial in today's society. That's another reason I applaud the NHA and look forward to attending the 2023 conference!

If you'd like to connect, I can be reached at [cydnotter.com](http://cydnotter.com). —🌱