

We could have told friends and family we had met aliens from Pluto who were now living with us and they would have been less shocked than when we told them we would be eating only whole, plant-based foods from now on and were giving up eating olive oil and drinking alcohol.

Was it all easy? Not at all. Dr. Weiss put Deborah and me through a 30-day plant-based detox that was one of the hardest things physically and psychologically I have ever done. The reactions of our friends and family to our new way of eating were harder still.

I am certain that we could have told friends and family we had met aliens from Pluto who were now living with us on our farm and they would have been less shocked than when we told them we would be eating only whole, plant-based foods from now on and were giving up eating olive oil and drinking alcohol. After all, I was a trained sommelier (with an extensive wine cellar), Deb was a phenomenal baker, and many of our vacations and much of our leisure time had involved traveling to eat local foods and drink local wines, the vast majority of which would now be off limits. In fact, we lost several long-time friends because they simply could not accept our change in lifestyle.

Were the hardships worth it? Yes, many times over. My cholesterol is now 150, I feel better physically and mentally than I have since my early 20s (perhaps ever!), I've lost 30 pounds, my visceral fat is now an astoundingly low 3, my overall body fat varies between 5% and 8%, my resting pulse has dropped from the mid-50s to low-40s, and my marathon running pace has decreased from 8:34 per mile to 7:39! More importantly, all my blood markers have improved so much that I have gone from having a moderate risk of developing heart disease to essentially no risk, and with that, my lifelong worries about someday suffering a major cardiac event have all but disappeared. 🌱

# A Journey of Healing

**Finding strength, resilience, and gratitude after a life of health issues**

by Jennifer Diamond

My journey into the whole-food, plant-based life was not a straight and narrow line, and it was never about weight loss. It was always about health, trying to get ahead of a constant onslaught of health issues. My path led me through countless struggles and treatments and, through it all, made me increasingly aware of the pivotal role that nutrition plays in our lives.

My childhood was anything but typical; my parents' tumultuous relationship ended in divorce when I was just two years old, leaving me as an only child to navigate the chaos. Custody battles, financial disputes, and even parental abductions made my upbringing far from ordinary. When I was 10, my mother won a court battle allowing us to move from Illinois to California, a shift that forced me to shuttle back and forth across the country for visits, fostering issues related to separation anxiety, travel, self-confidence, and transitioning between households. By 17, I chose to move out and live on my own, balancing a job while attending high school, determined to build some sense of normalcy and control in my life.

My health challenges started at around five years old when I was diagnosed with allergies that would be treated by a series of injections intermittently over the next four decades. During those 40 years, I faced a range of health issues including hormonal skin problems treated with Accutane (an intense kidney-stressing medication); tumors and growths including an ovarian cyst the size of a grapefruit, a breast cyst, and multiple other growths; and a pituitary adenoma that required brain surgery.

In my teens in the aftermath of a car accident, I found myself engaged in a lawsuit for a lower back injury, which would persist and eventually require

spinal surgery for a herniated disk. Following the birth of my first child, I was diagnosed with hypothyroidism, an ailment that would require lifelong treatment. Between my first and third child, medical concerns grew with the discovery of a nodule in my thyroid gland, which has been closely monitored ever since.

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As my own life took its course, my marriage ended, leaving me to raise three children on my own with the added challenges of an ex-husband who failed to provide court-ordered child support and had zero contact with my children. This period tested my strength and resilience.

Trying to regain control over my life, I became fixated on my fitness. The documentary *Super Size Me* energized me to eliminate fast food from my diet, and I transitioned to healthier eating habits, replacing things like Doritos with tortilla chips because I thought that was better nutrition.

However, persistent sinus infections and dizziness began to plague me.




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Antibiotics became a monthly routine, as the infections frequently coincided with my menstrual cycle. A pharmacist's cautionary advice pushed me to seek a new doctor, which in 1997 ultimately led to the first of three sinus surgeries. Despite these interventions, recurrent infections and fatigue continued, sometimes forcing me to halt my fitness regimen.

Seeking a holistic approach to my health, I consulted a naturopath who performed a blood test that revealed my sensitivities to various foods. Following her dietary recommendations landed me in the ER with heart palpitations due to low potassium. Despite these setbacks, my pursuit of optimal health continued.

I discovered that the area where I grew up in California was once home to the Santa Susana Field Laboratory, a site used for federal studies involving radioactive and nuclear energy, leading to contaminants seeping into the soil and water table. Tragically, many of my friends from the region succumbed to various forms of cancer, prompting me to ponder the potential impact of environmental exposure on my own health issues.

I had previously dated a man who wanted to marry me, a proposal I resisted at the time. After a decade apart, we reconnected and eventually married in 2016. We moved to Arizona in 2010, where my sinus and allergy problems persisted even in the desert. I sought help from a new otolaryngology surgeon, leading to my third sinus surgery. During my preoperative scans, a small growth in my pituitary gland was detected.

An ongoing litany of other health challenges and treatments led me to various specialists, each providing only partial answers or treatments for my many ailments. As my pituitary tumor showed signs of growth, my neurosurgeon recommended brain surgery to remove it, a decision I had to make despite the absence of physical symptoms.

Although the surgery was a success, it came with complications, including a spinal fluid leak and prolonged postoperative sneezing, leaving me with enduring sensations on the roof of my mouth. These health setbacks marked a tumultuous period in my life, and I turned to a vegan lifestyle hoping to win back my health. However, that effort further exacerbated by my battle with anemia, potassium deficiency, and low white blood cell counts. As a result, I went back to a standard American diet as a last resort.

My health journey took a major turn in 2021 after receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. I experienced severe side effects and developed sensory and neurological issues leading to being virtually bedridden for 14 months while exploring a range of treatments. Navigating the complex landscape of treatments and doctor visits, I eventually found myself diagnosed with small-fiber neuropathy after a skin biopsy from my leg. This diagnosis offered some clarity but came with the bleak prognosis that it would only worsen over time, necessitating lifelong medication.

After facing a period of deep despair and more than a year seeking treatment from dozens of various physicians, I decided to reclaim my health by returning to a whole-

food, plant-based diet. The change in diet marked a turning point in my journey. My health gradually improved, mobility returned, and the unusual sensations began to fade. I saw the direct impact of nutrition on my health, emphasizing the transformative power of a WFPB lifestyle.

With the first, real signs of improvement, I embarked on a journey of healing, tapping into the support and knowledge of the WFPB community. I found a renewed sense of purpose, an understanding of the importance of nutrition, and the value of community support. While not completely healed, I've regained a substantial portion of my life, thanks to the healing potential of real, whole foods. The ongoing challenge serves as a reminder of the profound connection between food, lifestyle, and well-being.

Last year, 2023, was a transformative one. I made a conscious decision to dedicate this year to healing and to say "yes" to life's adventures. I've traveled, met influential figures in the WFPB community, and completed a 14-day fast at the TrueNorth Health Center. I continue to post on my YouTube channel, sharing my journey, experiences, what I've learned, how I eat, and the importance of community support.

My health journey is a testament to the resilience of the human spirit, the transformative power of food, and the remarkable impact of a supportive community. It has molded me into a person characterized by strength, perseverance, and gratitude. Life, to me, is no longer about mere survival, but about thriving and savoring every precious moment. 🌱