

# Then: Chips, Wings, and Whoppers; Now, a WFPB Pro

Openness to change leads to weight loss and a pain-free life.

by Ron Reynolds

I grew up in the '80s and was fortunate to have a stay-at-home mom who prided herself on making traditional (mostly) home-cooked meat-and-potato meals. We enjoyed snacks of packaged potato chips or nacho cheese tortilla chips on many nights. Friday night dinners consisted of fish sticks and French fries, and on Saturdays, Dad would pick up pizza and wings. (I'm in Buffalo, so those wings are just about mandatory with any pizza order.) No matter what was for dinner, we washed it down with a few glasses of 2% milk. By the time I made it to middle school, I was overweight. By high school, I was starting to have some mild pain in my hip.

As I got older and more concerned about my appearance, I'd try to lose weight. Years of various diets saw diminishing returns. I would eat the "healthier" version of the Standard American Diet, cutting out the chips, eating only lean meats, etc. Those efforts usually didn't last long, and the weight would return.

About 12 years ago, in the fall of 2011, my then-girlfriend (now wife), who was vegetarian at the time, suggested we attend a lecture by Dr. Neal Barnard. The talk was compelling, and we discussed eating vegan together. It was early in our relationship, so of course, sure, I'll try this vegan thing. I likely would have tried just about anything she suggested. We started a 21-day vegan jump-start on January 1, 2012. We continued on a vegan (but not WFPB) diet for a couple of years. As time went on, cheat days spread, and eventually we were back on the SAD. I had never cut out the processed oils and sugars.

The next day I woke up feeling cruddy and looked at the juxtaposition of the pending surgery and my bad habits (especially that Whopper), and I realized I needed to be less careless with my health and start taking better care of myself.

In 2020, I started a new job and was making bad, stress-induced dietary decisions. Not long after that, the pandemic hit and remote work became a way of life. Working from home, sitting on the computer all day, and not needing to walk more than 10 steps to the kitchen or restroom prompted me to really start packing on the pounds. After years of pain and increasing difficulty walking, in January, 2023, I finally made an appointment for a consultation with a surgeon regarding hip replacement. The night I made the appointment I rounded out a full week of terrible eating with a beef Whopper meal, complete with large fries and Diet Coke for dinner.

The next day I woke up feeling cruddy and looked at the juxtaposition of the pending surgery and my bad habits (especially that Whopper), and I realized I needed to be less careless with my health and start taking better care of myself. I was certain the surgeon would suggest some weight

loss prior to the surgery, so I decided to return to a vegan diet. I watched a few of Dr. Barnard's videos, among many others, and eventually decided I'd better try to cut out all of that processed oil and sugar I previously thought impossible to forgo. With my vegan experience and old recipes being a bit rusty, I started searching YouTube to expand my menu. I found lots of great channels, but Well Your World really helped me cement a WFPB way of eating. Dillon Holmes's approach was perfect for me and made eating whole-food, plant-based more accessible. I stopped eating any sort of processed food, and, except for a very few rare occasions, I prepared everything I ate myself. I was all in and WFPB-meal prepping like a pro by mid-February, 2023.

I started in January, 2023, with the scale just north of 300 pounds. By the time the surgery rolled around that August, I was down to 230 pounds. The weight loss was entirely due to diet change. Walking, my preferred exercise of choice, had been too painful. My blood work and preoperative testing all went well, and surgery and recovery went off flawlessly. I was back in the kitchen cooking and prepping in no time after the surgery.

This past fall, while seeking to expand my repertoire of plant-based knowledge and healthful recipes, I stumbled across a few videos from National Health Association's annual conferences and loved the prospect of getting together with others who ate and lived this way—not to mention a WFPB buffet! Shortly after that, I joined the NHA, hoping to make the trip to the conference. Since joining, I have found the insight, the information, and the recipes all very helpful in reinforcing best practices and staying the course.

THEN



NOW



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I now regularly take two- to three-mile pain-free walks. As of April, 2024, my weight is down to about 210, and I genuinely feel like I have a new body. I'm nearing my ideal weight, something I had all but given up on ever achieving. I have energy and a renewed excitement about life. The gains have been too great this time. I can't imagine I'll ever return to the old way of eating! 🌱