

My Plant-Based Story

Rachael Brown



Rachael Brown earned a plant-based nutrition certification and food and sustainability certification from the T. Colin Campbell Center for Nutrition Studies and eCornell. After being diagnosed with high cholesterol in her late 20s, she discovered [The China Study](#) and transitioned her family to the whole-food, plant-based, no-oil (WFPBNO) lifestyle, and her cholesterol immediately dropped 50 points. She has been an adjunct professor in nutrition and wellness, a certified yoga and Pilates instructor, and a licensed massage practitioner. She lives in California, where she can usually be found trail running, rock climbing, cycling, and bikepacking with her husband. Learn more at www.forkssakebook.com.

HWS: Tell me about your journey to adopt A whole food plant based no oil lifestyle.

RB: In December it will be 13 years. I had high cholesterol since my early 20's, and they wanted to put me on medication. I've grown up with my dad being on cholesterol medication, different statins, and he'd have all these odd side effects like losing his sense of taste, and would have to change medications. They always told me to cut out eggs and cheese and exercise a little bit more, and so I would do that and it would be okay, and then it would just always creep back up. This was frustrating because I ran trail, rode bikes, climbed, hiked. I felt like I was a healthy person and eating mostly a healthy diet. I was raised mostly vegetarian. My mom loves fish, and she would cook meat for my dad, but we mostly ate vegetarian growing up.

Then, almost 13 years ago, my nephew, who was five years old, was diagnosed with cancer. His mom was in nursing school, and she had the good fortune of having a professor who asked her if she had looked at the role of nutrition in cancer. He suggested books like *The China Study* by T. Colin Campbell. They had a small hobby farm, so she had taught me how to pull mozzarella cheese, and we had 13 chickens at the time. She read the book, and many others, and passed them on to me. They went vegan overnight, and I was astounded at their change. But once I read *The China Study*, I was blown away. I was primarily angry because nobody had told me this news, and just frustrated that it was out there but the general public didn't know about it. At that time Doctor John McDougall had a free online ten-day program where they provided all the recipes, and you get

your blood work done and then get it done again 10 days later, so that's what we did. I couldn't get back in until day 17 for my second blood draw, but when I went to my doctor, he said, "What did you do?" because my cholesterol had dropped 50 points in 17 days. He said, "I couldn't do that with medication, so whatever you're doing, keep doing it." At the time I said it was good and bad news, because we were thinking, "Yay, it worked!" and also, "Oh shoot, now we need to do this!" We had those 13 chickens, and a daughter who had an organic egg business. But we made the switch, because it was such an amazing difference.

We had a lot of trial and error. Our kids were six and eight at the time, so it was a lot of learning how to transition, and about personality differences and how different people adopt change, and then just trying different tricks and tools to try and make it work. It took a while, but both my kids are in college now, and they, along with many of their friends, choose to eat this way because they feel better.

HWS: When you made this change, what was most difficult for you and your family?

RB: Initially, eating out was really tricky and we kind of went different ways. We started out black and white, deciding we were eating this way. And for some of us in the family that was fine, and for others, not so much. My son went to a birthday party, and I think he ate either 12 hot dogs and six cookies or six hot dogs and 12 cookies, I can't remember which. We quickly realized this all or nothing was maybe not the best tactic. So then we said, okay, we eat this way at home, but when we go other places, you

can choose what you want to eat. Eating out was then the splurge, so everybody would go crazy on pizza or whatever. Then slowly just over time, everybody chose to eat differently because they didn't feel as good. And I would say eating out is still tricky because there's oil and almost everything, but compared to 13

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years ago, there are so many different options, and some restaurants that are fully plant based. At the time, I just had to learn to let everybody have their own process, but also hold a bit of a line at least at

home. And if we had plenty of wonderful food at home, you didn't really miss it. We'd make lovely pizza at home, and everybody was really happy with it. Or our kids would be so excited to go to a friend's house and have mac and cheese, and then they'd come home and say, "It didn't taste as good as I remember." We made our own version at home, which they really loved.

HWS: What's been most rewarding with this change?

RB: Watching my children adopt this, I think has been most rewarding, in addition to the benefits that we ourselves have. I now have low cholesterol. My son and I carry the Apoe 3/4 gene, so we've done carotid artery tests for years, and we've watched them incrementally change for the better. My husband and I got a calcium test done two years ago, and we had perfect scores, so literally watching heart disease reverse was really amazing. But then to watch my kids -- you know, it's hard when you're a teenager and your friends are making fun of you, to stand up for something you believe in. To see them doing it on their own, and now seeing them tell their friends about it, has been really, really rewarding. Also on the rewarding side, my husband's parents adopted

this lifestyle, too, and that was a shocker because my husband's dad is a cowboy from Montana, and he was the guy who would cut the steak fat off and eat it. He was diagnosed with brain cancer two years ago, but they adopted this way of eating and he's doing as well as he can be, and they have both lost extra weight and feel really good. It's been kind of a minor miracle watching that happen too.

HWS: How did you decide to write a book about this?

RB: I was doing other work. My degree is in geography, and when the kids were young, I taught yoga and Pilates. Then I went back to school for massage, and I was doing a neurological technique, helping people get out of chronic pain, which was really rewarding. But once COVID hit, that was shut down for a time. My kids were at home doing high school online, and I was trying to stay out of their hair and not go crazy myself. I got my plant based nutrition certificate from the Center for Nutrition Studies and E-Cornell, and then I did their Food and Sustainability Certificate course, which was also wonderful.

I was telling my family all about this every night at dinner, and I think they were kind of tired of listening to it. I just kept thinking, I want to share this with people, but I wasn't sure what would be the most effective way. That's when I decided maybe I could put our story into a book, into kind of a guide. I decided to write the book that I wish I would have had when we transitioned.

I love *The China Study*. I consider it kind of the bible of plant-based eating. But for some people it's a pretty heavy read to start with. When I talk to young families especially, parents would say, "I don't time to read a long book. I read blogs." I wanted to write something that was short and sweet. I was really excited when I was doing a podcast with someone and they said, "It's a perfect airplane book. I read it in four hours." That that's what I was going for - something quick and easy to grab ahold of with actionable steps so that people could do the same thing that we experienced. Give it a go for 10 days. See how you feel. Then you can do more research, you can get more cookbooks, you can do all those things. But give it a go for yourself. Learn why it makes sense for your body and for the planet. Because I think once people experience the benefits, it's hard to deny how wonderful it is.

HWS: I was curious about how you chose 10 days.

RB: Looking at all the different quick-start programs out there, it is between 10 and 12 days that people really experience the benefits, and it seems like a very doable period of time. In that period, even in two days, you might need to lower your blood pressure medication or your insulin. It gives your body a chance to start making these changes, and for you to really experience them. Your taste buds change right around two weeks, so if you can give yourself those ten days, it's a solid start.

HWS: If you could give advice to somebody just starting out, what advice would you give?

RB: It's changed over the years. What I would now say is to know the information, but second to that, is to know yourself. By that I mean, like I experienced with our family, different family members had different ways of adopting this. For some people, if you're really black and white, you may say, "I'm ready to clean out my cupboards and my fridge and I'm going to do this." That's great. And for other people, that's terrifying, and they don't do things that way. So, learning how to work with yourself in the process, whether you are somebody who wants to do the great clean out and give it a go, or whether you're somebody who wants to add a daily habit, like "I'm going to add greens to each meal this week," or "I'm going to add fruit an hour before my meal," or whatever it is, picking some healthy things to then crowd out some of those unhealthy habits that you just won't have room for anymore. You want to set yourself up for success, and you don't want to sabotage it. The hardest thing, I think, is when people say, "Oh yeah, I tried it, and it didn't work for me." And I just think, oh, how sad because it can work for everybody. It's just figuring out how to make it work for you. I want this to be a

lifestyle for people, not a diet. When someone says to me, "I know I should do this," I say, "Don't do it because you should do it. When you're really ready to do it, then talk to me and we'll do it. But until then, don't waste your time or my time or your money."

HWS: How did you choose your book title?

RB: We had a whole bunch of possible subtitles and titles, and this one was kind of cheeky and just made us laugh. I tested it among a group of friends, and 90% loved it and then 10%, were like one friend from church who said, "I wouldn't buy that book." So I thought, I understand for some people it might be offensive, but I was hoping for most people it would be more humorous than offensive. We are trying to make it fun and light and have it be something that you could just pick up and have some laugh out loud moments.

HWS: So what's next for you?

RB: People keep asking me, are you going to write another book? That was not my intention ever. I would love to maybe have a companion workbook to hand out to college students, or have a college student version. I plan to keep trying to reach people who are in that space of wanting to know more, or for people like you and I who might have family members who are like, I know you do this weird thing, I don't not going to read a really heavy book. Perhaps this would be a book that would be a good entryway for people who might not otherwise be interested. Just trying to spread the good news as far as and wide as I can. It's kind of my love letter to T Colin Campbell and John McDougall and Caldwell Esselstyn, these people who have spent their whole lives trying to spread the truth about how our bodies can heal themselves and how our planet can heal itself if we do the pretty simple but not easy work required.